

“The People Who Meet Jesus”

Text(s): Mark 2:1-22

- Pastor Mike Pancoast

Movie trailers that one sees on TV or in the theater are interesting things, mainly because they're so UNRELIABLE as to what the movie is about. I know, I know--the trailers, of course, want to hook you by giving you something that will make you want to come see the movie. Even if what you're given in the trailer has NOTHING to do with what the movie really is about. I experienced that this past Christmas as I prepared to watch *The Help* with my wife and her family. Pardon the political incorrectness, but based on the trailers, I was expecting a “chic flick” with a charming southern drawl. Little did I know that the story is MUCH more powerful than “boy-meets-girl amid the zany-madcap-misunderstandings-that- eventually- lead-to-a-happily-ever-after-ending,” oh, and with the quirky best friends to boot. Little did I know that the story is really about the heights and depths of human capabilities and sensibilities. Little did I know that I'd be watching what is easily one of the best movies of the year, if not EVER in my not-so-humble opinion.

The Gospel of Mark provides its own trailer too in its opening chapter, and it goes like this, without the hyped-up movie trailer voice to go with it: first of all, the very first line of the Gospel of Mark, “*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God...*” (1:1) and then the very first lines out of Jesus' mouth: “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near...*” (1:15). UNLIKE the movie trailers that might tease you but otherwise keep you guessing, Mark's movie trailer drives to the heart of the matter: *Whoever this Jesus Christ is, he's all about Good News, and whatever this Good News is, the time for it is NOW, and the kingdom of God, the ruling activity of God has come as near as it ever has been in this Jesus Christ.* Not too exciting, admittedly, but at least as teasing as any Hollywood trailer if we let it be so: *Just what exactly is this Good News?*

Of course, if you want to know how the trailer of the movie relates to the story, you've got to go to the picture, and if you want to know what this Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God is, at least according to Mark, you're gonna have to interact with his story a little bit...which, of course, is EXACTLY what we aim to do again the rest of this year. But at least for today's purposes, we get some meaty enough pictures of what this Good News looks like in Christ Jesus—that is, whenever the Good News of Jesus Christ shows up, there is (1) healing; (2) the forgiveness of sins; and (3) there is invitation and welcome to those who know themselves to be sinners—or at the very least, there is not an *avoidance* of those said sinners.

Each little vignette that we hear today gives us a glimpse, then, not just into Mark's Gospel, but into places and ways where I would be so bold as to say that we can longingly look for that same reigning activity of God in our time, in our lives, and in our world.

So we see a man about whom we are told virtually nothing about other than the main detail in his life, his profound need of healing from a paralysis that whatever its cause and origin, prevents him from seeking the cure he so desperately needs, if there even is one. We see this man's friends, so hopeful in what Jesus can purportedly do and so committed to this man's cause that in our age so characterized by the isolation of our busy-ness, that I can't help but see a certain

aspect of wellness with or without this man's ability to walk. And we see, ultimately, the once-paralyzed man rolling up his mat. We see the healing in which, surely, the man's friends had placed their hope-filled faith, without any knowledge whatsoever on our part as to the paralyzed man's status of faith. *The Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God... The time is fulfilled...the time is here, now, and on-going, and the kingdom of God...the ruling activity of God...is right here in front of you...".*

On top of what we see, we hear words that point us toward this here-now-and-on-going ruling activity of God as Jesus heals this man by declaring to him the forgiveness of sins. It was simply understood that whatever blessing or curse, whatever joy or calamity, whatever success or failure, these were earned from God by the blessed, or as the case may be, the cursed. Whatever the burdens of conscience, whatever the separation between God and man, whatever the isolation between religion and peacefulness, whatever whys and wherefores of this man's sufferings...or yours, brothers and sisters in Christ... Jesus declares healing in his words, "Son... daughter... YOUR sins are forgiven" (2:5), without so much even as a confession or sense of remorse on the part of the man once paralyzed. *The Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God... The time is fulfilled...the time is here, now, and on-going, and the kingdom of God...the ruling activity of God...is right here in front of you...".*

And on top of the healing we see... on top of the forgiveness we hear... the Word from Mark invites us to see the kind of company that Jesus keeps, the kind of people that populate the kingdom of God, the kind of people who see and hear healing and forgiveness. "Tax collectors and sinners" is all that we're given to describe the people Jesus is hanging out with, seemingly in response to the call of and received invitation to Levi the tax collector. No juicy details. No delineated lines, beyond the tax collectors, about who's a sinner and who's not, though usually the biblical label "sinner" as it's used here means "those with a blatant disregard for the Law of God and the Laws of Moses." It is sufficient to say that the sinners about whom Mark is talking as a category of folks easily identified by the Pharisees would probably NOT be sitting on the school board or singing in the church choir. Or to put it in our terms... who would YOU say would be on the list? The roughneck in the oil patch? The so-called "working girl" dancing in the bars? The chronically inebriated Indian? The overly-frequent tenant of the Salvation Army shelter? Certainly not YOU. Or ME. And yet, what we see and hear is not just invitation but even a seeking out and welcome to those who know themselves to be sinners—or at the very least, there is not an *avoidance* of those said sinners. "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" they ask his disciples (2:16). *The Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God... The time is fulfilled...the time is here, now, and on-going, and the kingdom of God...the ruling activity of God...is right here in front of you...".*

It's easy to mislead by a movie trailer. It's simple to see a 30-second clip and expect something completely different than what the full 2-hour story actually holds. Do not be misled by Mark's trailer about the unfolding story of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Good News to all who know themselves to be sick and in desperate need of one who will eat and drink with them. *The Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God... The time is fulfilled...the time is here, now, and on-going, and the kingdom of God...the ruling activity of God...is right here in front of you...".*
Amen.