

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Mark 1:21-34
Sermon Title: "Like a Rubberband" (Traveling through Mark's Gospel)

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What attracts us to people? What is it in a person that makes us want to say, "I'd like to hang out with him or her"?

Looks are important to us. We have heard the old cliché that "beauty is only skin deep", but the way a person looks may or may not make us take notice. The way they treat us is also important. If a person treats us with respect, we will want to do the same. If a person is nasty to us, even if only a few words are said, we want to stay clear of him or her. The person's sense of humor is important, and attractive. The person's insights and wisdom, especially when such wisdom is expressed with compassion. The person's similar likes and dislikes: if we like sports, we have something common to talk about. If we like some sort of a craft like quilting or knitting, that attracts us to each other. All sorts of things attract us to people, which may or may not be the same things to all of us.

What attracted people to Jesus? What is it in him that made people say, "I'd like to hang out with him?"

In the beginning of Mark's Gospel, Jesus is a relative newcomer. We don't read about him coming on the scene through a miraculous birth, although we get that story from Matthew and Luke. In Mark, Jesus just appears. John the Baptist talks about Someone arriving who is greater than he, and the prophet Isaiah attests to John's work to prepare the way of the great Person. And then in quick succession, Jesus is baptized, tempted by the devil in the desert, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God to everybody.

Mark tells us that Jesus' message is simple: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the good news." Is this enough to attract people to Jesus? For some, it is. For some they have been waiting for God's kingdom to be at hand, within grasp, because what has been within grasp is a lot of sadness and misery and pain. They have been feeling alone and left out, and God has seemed strangely distant. Jesus' simple yet powerful message is enough for them. God is not distant. He and his kingdom are right here, right now. Turn away from the sadness and misery and pain that sin brings, and accept the good message about life and peace and joy. For some people, this is enough to know.

Jesus did more than just preach about God's kingdom being at hand. After choosing disciples, they all visit a synagogue, in which he begins to teach. Jesus holds his own Bible study there. The temple is where people go to worship God, but the synagogue is a separate place where people go to learn about God. They pick passages from Scripture and debate them, trying to get to the deeper and broader meaning behind the words. Jesus shows up one Sabbath day and begins to debate the Scriptures in such ways that people have not heard before. He seems to know what he is talking about, even more so than the rabbis know. People perk up their ears, and they hear God's word new and fresh, and that is enough to attract people to Jesus.

Years ago, two boys came to visit a Bible study on a college campus. The boys were dressed in white shirts and black ties. They were taught a certain message about God, and told to visit from house to house, sharing that message. They came across a gathering of students, ready to share their message. But those in the Bible study had a message to share, as well. We have heard it said before that two men enter, and only one leaves? One of those boys was not attracted to the message, but the other was. He heard the good news of the kingdom in a fresh and new way,

and he wanted to hear more. He put aside his familiar beliefs for Christ.

And not only did Jesus preach and teach, but he also healed, and in healing he did what people thought was impossible. As Jesus is teaching in a synagogue, a man enters who has an unclean spirit within. He can't do anything about the spirit. It controls his movements, his thoughts, his words, and as much as he fights against it the spirit tightens its grip on him. Nobody else can do anything about the spirit; in fact, they probably run every time this guy gets too close. The spirit, not the man, cries out to Jesus, calling him out as the Holy One of God. The spirit is not preaching or teaching but is accusing Jesus. "Jesus is going to destroy us," it says. "Jesus should leave us alone." If anybody tried to debate with this spirit, it would scream even louder, dominating the conversation, making everyone believe its words.

Jesus doesn't debate or argue with what the spirit says. Jesus does the impossible by telling it to shut up, and then to come out. And it does. The man is free, and is healed of his disease.

Jesus goes on to heal Peter's mother-in-law. People bring more sick folks to him, hoping he may cure them of whatever ails them. The impossible is

made possible: diseases go away, demons flee, the deaf hear, the mute talk. Doing the impossible attracts people to Jesus, and his fame grows.

What attracted us to Jesus? What is it in him that makes us say, "I'd like to hang out with him?"

We are here in worship for a reason, and it's because Jesus attracted us to him. Something caught our attention. Something has drawn us to this place to find out more. What was it? Was it something Jesus did? Was it something he said?

Like the people in Mark's Gospel, there is something about Jesus that made us want to listen, and to listen some more, and then to accept that he could do something for us, that he could be Somebody for us. Savior, Lord, Healer, Redeemer...

Back in 1985 I accepted Christ as Lord and Savior of me and of everybody. Boom, it happened in a flash one night. It all made sense, like it hadn't before. I needed peace in my life, with my parents divorcing and my seemingly perfect family falling apart with all those relatives I used to have fun with. Christ gave peace, and said things would turn out all right, if I accept and follow him. I needed direction, because I was going to be a senior in high school, and had no clue what I would do in college or in life. Jesus made clear the

path, and showed me how to walk it, as long as I stuck to his guidance. Boom, it all made sense, those things my youth directors told me, those things pastors had said in church, those things my parents taught me.

And then, while I was a freshman in college, I started to doubt what Christ had to say. One of my religion professors taught our class that the Gospel of John was not a real gospel. It didn't look like the other Gospels (Matthew, Mark, or Luke) and so it was, in fact, just a philosophical document created by a group of people called the Gnostics. The Gnostics were not true Christians as we understand Christianity, and so their Gospel was not true. I started to question if his words might be true. He had the doctoral degrees – he was the professor. I could have left it at that, and chosen to disregard one Gospel out of four in the Bible. Or, I could sit down and read it. Actually read, and see what John has to say about Jesus. I use no commentaries or class notes. I just read it. By the time I got to the woman who was caught in adultery in Chapter 8 of John, I was convinced that my professor was wrong. John was not a false Gospel. Jesus' words spoke to me. His actions touched me. And I was attracted once more to our Lord and Savior. I must say as a conclusion that that professor ended up being a good professor for me.

Although I didn't agree one hundred percent with all he said, I found him to be a good teacher, because he made me think. He made me question and investigate, and discover the thing that God wanted me to discover. Believe it or not, I was also attracted to Christ through that one professor and others I had.

So what attracted you to Jesus? A word? A deed? The impossible made possible? I spoke with somebody last week who said that life is not fair, because sin takes a hold of it and causes physical pain, and sin causes us to doubt and become frustrated, and we choose to give up. BUT, this person said to me, "I turn to God and find I need everything I need in life. I find that I can get through the pain and problems, and know he is working everything toward the good." Maybe this is what has attracted us to our Lord and Savior.

Or maybe it is the way our Lord and Savior can straighten out our lives, when we hit rock bottom. We've tried the best we could to find answers, and they still haven't come. We have screamed at and vented with people, but that has only released the pressure for a day or two. We have been stubborn about doing it ourselves and figuring it out all by ourselves, and we just keep spinning out of control. Eventually we get to

the place where we say, “I can’t stand it anymore. I can’t do this by myself. Lord, you have to help. You have to do it for me.” When we let go, become vulnerable before God, things happen. Answers start to come. Hurt and anger fade away. We feel better, having a clearer vision and a better attitude. All because we give our situations and ourselves completely over to our Lord and Savior, who can shoulder any burden. That has attracted us to Christ, his ability to make the impossible possible, his skill in taking a handle of our lives.

There are the things that have attracted us to Jesus, and those are the things that keep attracting us to Jesus. The attraction to him should never stop. Like the people in our story today, we should always be amazed. We should always question, “Who is this Person,” with the desire to get to know Jesus even better. We should be impressed with his words – we should be impressed with his authority. Those things never stop amazing us.

We will have those moments, in which we are bitter about something that bothers the heck out of us, and we cannot let it go. We will have those moments, in which we are so sure that we can figure it all out without anybody’s help. And then we hear something

that Christ says, and we realize how wrong we are. Have you had that feeling before? A light bulb shines in our brains. A wave of understanding and relief washes over us. We realize how dumb we have been, and we want to give ourselves a dope slap on the forehead. We say to ourselves, “Duh, why didn’t I see that clearly before?” Christ reveals to us that which we need to see. Christ moves us down the path of life by one more step. We want for him to do it again, because we like the feeling of having our hearts being comforted and our eyes opened wide. We like that feeling of being wrong, because it isn’t that we get down on ourselves but we feel this sense of relief that we don’t have to worry about that situation anymore. The answer is there. The help and support are there. We want that feeling over and over. We want Christ to amaze us once more.

Jesus comes on the scene in Mark 1 with a message and a plan. Through Mark, that message and plan will touch as many people as possible. And they will be amazed. They will be astonished. They will be transformed. We know what that it like, because like a rubber band we are always snapped back, brought back into presence of Christ, and made new again.

Assurance of Pardon:

Hear the *Good News!* The saying is sure and worthy of our full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, that we might be dead to sin and be alive in Christ. Friends, in the name of Jesus Christ, you and I are forgiven! Amen.