

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Mark 4:21-32

Sermon Title: "The God-Honest Truth" (Traveling through Mark's Gospel - Pentecost)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

May 27, 2012

Jesus can ask silly questions now and then. Not to say that Jesus is silly, but some of his questions seem a little odd and ridiculous. Can good fruit grow on a bad tree? Of course not. Can a spring of pure water taste like salt water? No. How can Satan cast out Satan? He can't. Silly question. Does a person bring out a lamp in order to put it under a basket or under the bed? No way. Ridiculous.

But this is what Jesus asks in Mark 4. Where does a lamp go, under a basket? No. They go on tables, on mantles above the fireplace, or on night stands. Lamps back in Jesus' time were oil lamps, full of olive oil and lit with a flame. The open fire at the end would consume the oil inside, and then somebody would have to fill it again with more olive oil. You don't put an open flame under a wicker basket, or the basket will erupt in flames. Neither do you put the open flame under a bed, because even our modern-day beds would become way-too toasty warm. Silly questions – silly ideas.

Yet Jesus isn't being silly when he asks the

questions. He is serious. Nobody would be so ridiculous as to put an open flame under a basket or bed, so why would somebody be so ridiculous as to let hidden things stay hidden? Hidden things that should be revealed, open for all to see? Hidden things like God's truth, the God-honest truth that we are sinful human beings that don't want God around most of the time. The God-honest truth that we cannot remain as sinful human beings, because such sin only makes us more bitter and isolated, destroying everything good about us. The God-honest truth that the more we see our sin, the more we realize how much we need God. The God-honest truth that we can choose God and not our sin, and God may heal us of our sin through Jesus the Son.

So many Pentecosts ago, when all those disciples sat in an upper room, open flames rested on their heads, burning brightly. There was nothing hidden about those flames – they burned with the power of the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit gave each disciple the ability to speak the God-honest truth in different languages. It didn't matter if most of them grew up in the same Jewish villages. They were now going to speak Egyptian and Cappadocian and Mesopotamian, and every other –ian languages in order to get the God-

honest truth out there. People need to know about their sin. They need to know how far away they stand from God. But they don't have to stand so far away any longer. God is reaching out to them and inviting them to come back. God yearns to heal their bodies and their minds and their spirits and their relationships and everything else about them. In all those different languages, people heard the God-honest and became disciples.

But then, as Jesus is speaking in Mark 4, his happy conversation about the God-honest truth turns a bit sour. Jesus has to warn the people of something before he continues on. He says that we should take heed, because the same measure we use to share God's honest truth will also be used on us. What does that mean? Well, Jesus explains that if we hear the God-honest truth and share it with others, more will be given to us. That sounds nice. It is like being a reservoir full of water, like Lake Lanier. The more water that Lake Lanier has, the more people will benefit with good, clean water. The more God dishes out to us, the more opportunities we have to affect people in positive ways. We have more resources for feeding people at the Food Pantry and for sending youth to their summer retreats. The more we spend in

our Life Groups, the better equipped we are to face the struggles of friends and co-workers or anybody else. The more we worship, the more appreciative we are with what God has given us, and we may use those talents and possessions to reach out to others. So, the more God-honest truth we receive, the more we may hand out, and that will continue to increase.

That is the key: *to hand it out*. Because the God-honest truth is not like money which we must hoard for retirement or a rainy day. The God-honest truth is not for our own benefit, never to be revealed to anybody else. If we keep God's truth for ourselves, we might as well light oil lamps and put them under wicker baskets or under our beds. That's ridiculous.

Jesus knows that there are people who will receive God's honest truth and hoard it for themselves. They are happy that they are going to heaven, but they don't care where others will go. Some will keep the God-honest truth and use it as a bat to beat people over the head with. Some will keep the God-honest truth and sell it for a profit. Some will use their status as God-honest truth holders, and become cults of personality, taking focus away from Jesus and putting it on themselves. A time will come, Jesus warns, when those who have stockpiled the God-honest truth will lose everything. They will miss so many opportunities

to share God's truth and love and comfort. There will be many regrets, so many lost moments that they can never get back. All that might be left is a burned wicket basket or a bed roaring in flames.

Our Christian faith is meant to be seen and heard.¹ We are meant to be like reservoirs that open the sluice gates and let the water flow. If we are sharing the God-honest truth through words and deeds, then we are in the clear. We are like the disciples at Pentecost who received more ministry, and more people came to know Christ. We don't have to worry about burning baskets and beds, because we have placed our lamps in the right places.

But what about the results? We are a people who like to know the results, when asked to do something. Two Saturdays ago, members from the Baptist and Methodist churches joined us to put together 14,000 food packets for people in poor countries. 14,000 food packets we made in an hour and a half! Those packets are going somewhere: to Africa, to South America, to Asia. We want to know the results. Who is going to eat those packets? How happy will they be to receive them? We need to know.

Yet, in the Christian world, we do not get the

¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, cf. 97.

results. When we do ministry for others, most of the time we never see the results of our labor. Oswald Chambers once said that we are poured out like water from a jug. God pours us out as he sees fit, but we don't know where the "water" goes. We don't know how the "water" influences others. We might think we are just being poured onto the ground, but we aren't. God is using us for a special purpose that only he knows about - we just might not ever see the results. God fills us again and pour us out somewhere else. So we listen to God's honest truth, and grow in faith and love, and share that God-honest truth with others, and hope they might grow in faith and love as well.

Jesus assures us that our efforts are not done in vain. He tells a parable about a farmer throwing seeds of grains across his fields. The farmer spreads the seeds, and when the bag is empty he goes home. He does other farming chores around the house. He hopes that the seeds out in the field will grow. Maybe it will or maybe it won't.

Yet, Jesus assures us that when the God-honest truth is spread – when we hear it and then distribute it – it will always grow somehow, someday. We don't know how – we don't know when. But God's honest truth sinks into the minds and hearts of others, just

as a seed sinks into the soft soil. It takes root, and begins to show life, and starts to influence one facet of a person's life, and then another, and then another. Soon the seed of God's honest truth is influencing much of what a person thinks and does and says. The person sees the truth, and wants more of the truth, so he or she goes out and finds places to nourish the truth within.

Jesus says that a seed in the ground produces a blade first, then a head, then a full grain, and then a ripen harvest.² The disciples of Pentecost so long ago started with the simple seed of God's honest truth. Then they received a blade by receiving different languages. Then they received a head by going to different countries to share the God-honest truth. And those disciples helped to produce a great harvest by all the work they did. They would never understand how far the God-honest truth would spread, going as far as 2012 to a town called Morrow, and to a congregation called Morrow Presbyterian Church. We are the ripened harvest of their work. We also have seeds to plant. Growth is imperceptible, below the radar. We might not be able to chart it. But growth is inevitable. "Nothing can stop growth."³

² Mark 4:28-29.

³ Barclay, *Gospel of Mark*, cf. 104-106.

Jesus' last parable from Mark 4 might seem like a parable unto itself, but it does tie in with everything Jesus has been saying. You see, when we light an oil lamp or a candle, the flame is very small. It doesn't give off as much light as a 100 watt lightbulb or the florescent lights in our Sunday School rooms. But it is there, a small light that is quite intense in a dark room. Just enter a dark room with one candle, and you will be amazed by what you can see after a minute.

The flame from an oil lamp or candle is not a raging blaze. Neither is a mustard seed the size of an acorn or avocado seed. The mustard seed is very tiny, measuring only a millimeter or 2 millimeters in diameter. You don't think anything can grow from such a small seed. Yet Jesus says that though it is the smaller of all seeds on earth, "it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs," shooting up with large breaches.⁴ Though the beginnings are small, the results are huge. Although the God-honest truth begins in a person's heart like a small flame, it may soon consume the entire person for God. Though we may do a little here and a little there to share the God-honest truth with others, it is enough. Small is good. Sometimes we have to begin small, or else the God-

⁴ Mark 4:32.

honest truth will wash over somebody like a tsunami and they won't be able to handle it. Small is good. Baby steps. A little here and a little there. Growth will come. God will make his honest truth expand.

Although the mustard seed is so tiny, listen to all the minerals and nutrients it has inside. In one tiny mustard seed, there are carbohydrates and sugars. No surprise there. There is some water and protein inside. There is also: Vitamin A; Vitamins B1, B2, B3, B6, and B9; Vitamin C; Vitamin E; Vitamin K; Calcium; Iron; Magnesium; Phosphorus (a key ingredient for our DNA and RNA); Potassium; Sodium; and Zinc.⁵ If one mustard seed, a millimeter in diameter, can pack so much nutrition, how much more can a small act we do out of love for God impact one person? How much power do we possess in small ministry, so to speak, that would cause others to want to rest under the shade of God's honest truth, and invite others to experience God as well?

Every one of us has been given a mustard seed. Every one of us has been given a flame. The God-honest truth is ready to leave this small space and be increased in the larger space out there. Go to work.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mustard_seed and <http://nutritiondata.self.com/facts/spices-and-herbs/194/2>.

