

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Mark 3:1-6, 20-27

Sermon Title: "Blowing the Whistle" (Traveling through Mark's Gospel)

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Whistleblowers have a bad reputation. We say the word, and it might conjure up images of troublemakers. A whistleblower is a person who tells the public or someone in authority about alleged dishonest or illegal activities (misconduct) occurring in a government department, a public or private organization, or a company.¹ They see what is wrong, and they know it isn't good for them or anybody else. They have evidence to prove that a law or rule has been violated. Something has to change. They blow the whistle, so to speak, and who gets in trouble? Who gets fired? Not those violating the rule or law, but the whistleblower. For all the good they try to do, they get a bad rep.

Already in the Gospel of Mark, even by Chapter 3, Jesus is viewed as a whistleblower. He is blowing the whistle on people left and right, because the law of God is being violated left and right. For example, at the beginning of Mark 3, we read about a man entering

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whistleblower>.

a certain synagogue with a withered hand. Maybe the man was born with a hand that didn't grow out normal fingers like we have. Maybe a bone deficiency caused the hand to become weak and appear dried up. The man has a hand that isn't like anybody else's. And there is nothing wrong with that. It isn't as though he comes to the synagogue and makes a big fuss about being there, like the demon-possessed people who enter other synagogues. Those demon-possessed people foam at the mouth and shriek at anybody who looks at them. The man with the withered hand enters unnoticed, amid the crowd. He might have come to the synagogue a number of times, and people just know who he is. They know and they avoid him, because his hand is withered. Something must be wrong with him, and we might catch it, so leave him alone.

Jesus enters the synagogue, and the man with the withered hand is already there, possibly covering his hand so nobody sees it, but people know he is there. We don't know what set off Jesus at this moment. Could the man with the withered hand be sitting by himself with nobody to talk to? Could Jesus have seen this man enter the synagogue on a number of occasions, asked to sit somewhere else, far from the rest of the crowd? Whatever it is, Jesus has to say

something. The law of God is being violated: You love your neighbor as you love yourself. If we had a withered hand, we too would be embarrassed by it, but we too would hope somebody would care about us. It is possible that Jesus sees nobody caring about this one man, and so he blows the whistle.

Could any of those people in the synagogue have healed the man's hand like Jesus? No, never. But that is not the point. The point is not do we have the ability to heal diseases or deformities. Jesus isn't looking for this from the crowd. Jesus says to those whose eyes are glued to him, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" The crowd surprisingly has no answer. This alone should upset Jesus, because they are in the synagogue. The synagogue is where people go to debate God's word, to search for deeper and broader meanings that will affect lives. Jesus just throws out a question that somebody should take up and debate. The debate should carry from one person to another, and together they should conclude that Scripture, God's law, says to heal and not to harm, to save and not kill. These so-called students of Scripture are silent. They have been silent about helping a man with a withered hand – they have been silent about at

least being kind to the guy when he shows up. He wants to learn like everybody else. He wants to be a part of the community like everybody else.

Jesus doesn't expect all these students of Scripture to have miraculous powers. He knows they cannot heal the hand. However, he expects them to hear what God says in their studies, and do it. Carry it out, whether it is on the Sabbath or not. Jesus blows the whistles, and he even heals the man's hand. The man can use it for the first time – he doesn't have to hide it anymore.

Jesus fulfills the law of God, and what happens? The Pharisees, who are supposed to know and practice God's law back and forth, plot with the Herodians, their sworn enemies, to go after Jesus to kill him. Jesus blew the whistle, so he must be the troublemaker. Kill him. Jesus asked, "Is it lawful to save life or to kill?" The Pharisees and Herodians write their own law, and choose to kill.

Back in Chapter 1 of Mark, we read about a demonic spirit that shouted at Jesus, saying, "You have come to destroy us. Leave us alone, you Holy One of God." Later in Mark 3, we find people wanting to lay hands on him (not to bless him), saying he is out of his mind. The scribes say, "He has Beelzebub (the

Lord of the Flies). He is the ruler of demons, so that is why he can cast them out.”

Many accused Jesus of being the troublemaker. They said he was the source of their problems, and they didn't want him around. Today, people still feel the same way. They don't want Jesus around. We might be able to talk about God, because every red-blooded American believes in God. But when we evoke the name of Jesus, that is a whole other matter. Now we are getting too religious. Now we are getting preachy. People wave the hand at us (as a sign to go away). They give us a raspberry, as though we are crazy. They don't want that religious stuff – they don't want Jesus around.

Because Jesus puts an end to the partying. Because Jesus is such a downer for the good time we are having. Because Jesus has to make us think about our bad attitudes and our arrogant behavior. Because Jesus doesn't allow us to stay angry, unforgiving, isolated from others. Jesus makes us think. Jesus makes us take a step back and consider what we have or haven't been doing. Time seems to stop when we say the name Jesus. Try it sometime: evoke his name in school or at work, and watch everybody else around you become silent. The conversation dies. Even those who are Christians become worried about

what will happen next. Just evoking his name causes a disturbance in the force.

We live in a world that sin loves to manipulate. Sin loves to tell us that the only reason we are here is to have a good time. We are supposed to party like there is no tomorrow. We should have all the nice things they display on TV. We should look as buff and beauty as the *Jersey Shore* children, or the *Real Housewives of Wherever*. Come on, they are *real* housewives, not like the normal housewives out there who act so fake. Sin teaches us that there is a way to live, because we supposedly deserve it, because we are supposedly free to do as we like.

Then Jesus steps on to the scene. He blows the whistle on our so-called fun. He causes a disturbance of the force of sin. He speaks to us. He touches our minds and hearts. He says, “Really? Do you think this is the best way to live? Partying all the time and striving for all the goodies in the world only breed a selfish heart. You begin to feel nothing for the other person. You become blind to their needs, just like the man with a withered hand, who came to the synagogue faithfully to hear God’s word and yet nobody paid any attention to him.

“You see,” Jesus says to us, “you pursue things

that say will give you happiness, but never do. You always want more. More cellphones, more clothing, more muscles, more Facebook friends, more this, more that. But you are still unhappy,” Jesus says. “Really? Is this how you want to live?”

Jesus is an excellent whistleblower, because he loves us. He cares deeply about what we do every single day. He cares about the friendships we make with others. He cares about the things we plan to do during the day, even our long-term plans for the future. He cares about how we spend our nights: who we hang out with and where we decide to go.

Jesus cares about us, and like a loving parent wants us to do the right things. In this world of so many choices and so much sin, we don't always choose the right things. We don't always create the right sort of friendships. The things we want to do may lead us away from others and God.

In Mark 3, Jesus talks about divided houses. “How can Satan cast out Satan? A house divided cannot stand.”² People accused him of being a great Divider, when in fact Jesus is the great Uniter. He doesn't want us to fall away. He doesn't want us to break apart. Sin does that to us: causes gaps and

² Mark 3:23, 25.

holes in our relationships, our plans, our goals, and within ourselves. Sin divides. Christ unites. He sees how divided we are. He sees the holes and the gaps – some of them are deep chasms within our hearts that cannot be mended by any human capability. We ourselves may be houses divided, and Christ blows the whistle to say that we cannot live that way anymore. We cannot be divided within ourselves or outside ourselves, because all we have to show for it is pain, misery, and dejection.

In verse 27 of Mark 3, Jesus says, “No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, *unless he first binds the strong man.*”³ Sin binds us, so that our lives are plundered. Sin steals away all the good we have within us, within our families, within our relationships, and within our work and play. Christ, however, as whistleblower, makes us aware of sin, and how it tries to bind us. Christ points out how sin tries to plunder our goods and takes over every component of our lives. And then Christ makes us strong once more. He rebuilds the damage done to the house, and gives us tighter security, and better warning systems and alarms. When sin tries to plunder any of our good blessings, we are ready. We stand and do not fall with the help of the Holy Spirit.

³ Italics mine.

Whistleblowers have a bad reputation. Jesus pointed out the sins of many, and not everybody was too happy about it. Throughout Mark's Gospel, Jesus will continue to blow the whistle on sin. Some of those who hear the whistle will react in anger. They will plot. They will plan. They will choose to get rid of the Whistlesblower.

Yet, there will be some who hear the whistle, and will heed its sound. They will wake up as though from a dream, and realize how empty, how confusing, how wasteful their lives have been. They will acknowledge that Jesus does not want to ruin our fun – he wants to increase it. He doesn't want to take away our happiness – he wants to amplify it. Jesus never wants us not to live – he wants us to live, and to live abundantly. Thank God for Christ, the Whistleblower. We can finally move and breathe again.

