

Now You See Him, Now You Don't

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Mark 1: 29-39

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

How many of you have ever wished that you could be *invisible*? I think it's rather universal...as our minds spin almost out of control with the possibilities that being invisible could provide, many, if not all of them on the side of being rather nefarious, to say the least. But when it comes to the **reality** of life, **VISIBILITY** is much more the issue. In real estate, the name of the game is *location, location, location*. In retail it's the same thing....shelves at eye level sell better than the bottom rows and commercials during the Super Bowl get much more attention than during "Three's Company" reruns at 3 AM. With signs it's "bigger is better" and a walk down the detergent aisle teaches that "brighter is better" as well.

Think of the churches up and down Providence and Kempsville Roads: flashing red signs, waterfalls, fields of flags, and beautiful landscaping all exist to say, "*Come on in!*" One of the issues we are trying to remedy here at Hope is that we are set so far back from the road that it's (far too) easy to miss us, and we don't want that to happen! We WANT new people to find Hope....Hope in Jesus Christ.

But the lust to be seen and heard has NOT always been the case for the church, as a discovery made last year in Rihab, Jordan reminds us. Archeologists were working over the remains of a Christian church from the 3rd century....named St. Georgeous (NOT "gorgeous!"). They noticed a hollow-sounding spot in the floor. Digging down, they discovered an old air shaft that led down into a series of rooms and tunnels that even included an underground well and water cistern.

Farther down, one room appeared to be a chapel, containing an altar surrounded by stone seats. The archeologists also found some crosses of iron and other evidences that Christian worship took place there. An inscription on the

floor refers to “the 70 beloved by God and the Divine.” Coins and other items in the rooms indicate the area was used from AD 33 to AD 70, leading some scientists to believe that this may have been the first church in existence, used by Christians who were escaping from the Roman persecutions prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Whether or not that’s true, we know Christians have often been persecuted and, truth be told, still are in many parts of the world. When that happens, VISIBILITY is not high on the list of priorities.....usually it’s *invisibility*.

Today’s Gospel lesson takes us to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. He’s quite open and public with His work around the Sea of Galilee, visiting the home of Simon Peter and Andrew in Capernaum, where, when the work day is over, people from all over gather around the door and try to squeeze into the house.

In that very public place, Jesus healed the sick who came to him in droves, including the mother-in-law of Peter and cast out demons from those who were possessed by them, demons who, our text says, KNEW exactly with whom they were dealing: *The Holy One of God*.

Imagine, if you would, YOUR response if you....or someone you know and love were sick. You’ve NEVER heard of anything LIKE this and yet, it’s happening and there’s only one real course of action open: you go, you get in line, and you pray Jesus has time to bring healing to you as well. I’m not sure the lines in front of the house would resemble the out-of-control crowds at Walmart the day after Thanksgiving, but nevertheless, for Jesus it must have been an exhausting day. We’re reminded in the story of the woman healed by touching Jesus’ robe that He KNEW...and could FEEL each time that healing power left His body. Here He was healing dozens....perhaps hundreds of people, with crowds still on the way.

It’s no small wonder that Jesus, after catching a few hours sleep, got up long before dawn and went off by himself to pray. Can you imagine His prayers, filled with compassion for the people who had need not ONLY of physical healing, but for spiritual healing as well?

He was still praying when Simon and his friends found him. Any parent knows the feeling....try to get a MOMENT of “alone time,” try to be “invisible” for even a few minutes..... and here they come, one crisis worse than the next and each voice louder than the last. You can hear it in Peter’s words, “*EVERYONE is looking for you!*”

How do YOU respond to a cry like that? “*EVERYONE is looking for you!*” What do you want to do when that happens in your life? Come on, be honest. Unless we’ve got an ego the size of a fire truck and energy to match, there are times we just want to crawl into a hole and pull the lid over us....am I right?

I cannot tell you what Jesus was thinking, but Scripture DOES tell us what Jesus DID. He told His disciples, “*Come on fellas.....let’s head on to the nearby villages so I can preach there too, because THAT is why I came.*” And so He did, preaching, Mark says, in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Answer this question for me: what would have happened if Jesus had simply stayed in Capernaum and set up shop there? People would have come from far and wide....for what? For HEALING! For the MIRACLES! His VISIBILITY as a healer would literally have rendered *INvisibility* to His Messiah-ship.

There’s no question that Jesus’ heart broke for people who were sick or possessed by evil spirits.....He IS, after all, by His own admission, the “Good Shepherd,” and no GOOD shepherd wants his sheep to be sick. That’s why, time after time, He acted in compassion. But healing and casting out demons, important as they were and bringing incredible blessings to the people who were blessed by them, were only incidental to the main reason Jesus came: to **proclaim** that He was the Messiah, God’s “Word Made Flesh” and come to win salvation for us. Jesus clearly did not want the amazement over the miracles to overshadow the miracle of salvation.

The mission of Christ to bring SPIRITUAL and ETERNAL HEALING to all nations continues to be our mission to this very day. There may have been times in the history of the church where *INvisibility was the issue*, due to necessity, but thankfully, at this place, in this time we don’t have to go there.

That said, truth be told, we as a church still struggle with the issue of INVISIBILITY. Here's how that works: IF this morning I handed each of you a check for \$1,000 and said, "*If you come back next week I'll give you another check,*" would you come back?

And.... iF I told you that for every friend you brought I would give THEM a check as well, would you bring a neighbor? Of course you would!

FURTHERMORE, IF I were to promise that if you brought a sick friend, I could make them better, would you leave your crippled neighbor at home in his house? If you didn't bring him or her, you're a sorry excuse for a neighbor!

Jesus came to win our forgiveness, atone for our sins, and bring life and salvation.....ETERNAL life and salvation.....to the entire world. If there was a person in need of healing, so be it.....but only so they could have time to hear the life-giving message that He was...and still IS....the Messiah, the Savior, the Holy One of God.

How VISIBLE is Jesus Christ in your life? Do the neighbors KNOW that you are a Christian? Do your friends KNOW? Do your co-workers KNOW that you claim Jesus Christ as your Savior? If I walked into your house, would there be clear signs that it is the home of fellow believers?

Or.....is your faith a secret known only to a few of us on Sunday mornings?

Friends, it's so ironic that while we live in a era where we are NOT persecuted for our faith and we don't have to hold our church services deep underground in caves, we have become all but "invisible" in a culture that accepts almost anything as "normal." Perhaps it's because no one is seriously threatening our faith that we have become lackadaisical about it. With Christianity out in the open as it is, literally ANYONE can drive in off the street and sit with us on Sundays as we worship our Lord and study His word.

Maybe THAT'S we don't take as seriously as we should our Lord's great commission to MAKE disciples of all nations! I once preached a series of

sermons comparing Christianity with the other “great religions” of the world. The result of that sermon? One family left our church because I had DARED to claim that Christianity was the only way to heaven!

I'll end on this. Every single day thousands of people are dying without knowing Jesus Christ as their Savior. We live in the 3rd greatest mission field in the world (the 1st being China and the 2nd being India.) We're living in the most fantastic era of communication humankind has ever seen. Our ability to get the WORD of JESUS out is only limited by the amount of time and energy we have.....and I do believe HOPE has a lot of it!