

## Meeting Jesus... Again: 3. Pressing on Even When It's Hard

Mark 5:1-13

March 24, 2019

Pastor Steve Richards

You probably wouldn't know it by looking at me, but I have a health club membership – and I use it! At least a few times a week. Often when I get home from a workout, Amanda will ask me how it went, and my response is "I hate it." There are not many things in life that will cause me to give that kind of response, but I hate it. There's a reason it's called a workout. If I'm doing what I'm there to do, there comes a point when I want to quit. There are easier things to do and a lot of things I could be doing that don't involve sweat, but what I've discovered is if I will press on and move through the point where I want to quit, it gets better. My life gets better.

And if we are going to find the life that Jesus offers, we can't give up even when it's hard, because that's when we are getting close to the Kingdom. Every morning, we have a decision – comfort or discomfort. In our relationships, do we ignore the broken places and pretend everything is okay or do we press on? At work, do we have the crucial conversations? Do we stay comfortable or press on. If we want the life Jesus offers, do we choose easy? Or do we choose the path that Jesus lays out before us? Jesus is remaking us from inside out, and transformation is not easy.

In the first four chapters of Mark, we see Jesus performing acts of power in the region of Galilee. This was familiar territory for the disciples and these must have been amazing days as they watched Jesus heal people, cast out demons, feed thousands, and teach with stories that they would never forget. But then Jesus calls them to get into a boat to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, and along the way they encounter a terrible storm in which they fear for their lives – not realizing Jesus was in the boat and what Jesus in the boat could mean.

When Jesus said, "**Let's cross over to the other side of the lake.**" He had a purpose and a destination. This lake that we know as the Sea of Galilee is 8 miles wide and 13 miles long. The west side was the Jewish side and the east side was the Gentile side. So when Jesus says, let's go to the other side of the lake, the disciples thought – why would we do that? No righteous Jew would ever go over there. We can't go over there. They raise pigs and eat them. And they are not like us. It's possible that someone in the boat remembered the story of Jonah and how God sent a storm because we headed in the wrong direction. "God is telling us that we cannot go over there! Let's turn back!" But Jesus had a purpose and a destination. **As soon as Jesus got out of the boat, a man possessed by an evil spirit came out of the tombs.** In the first century, an evil spirit covered any and every illness that they did not understand. Not only are the disciples in a place they had never been and didn't ever want to be. But they are being greeted by a man who was considered so unclean and untouchable that people from town forced him to live in a cemetery. And the disciples who have just survived a storm in which they feared death are now facing a fear that has taken them so far outside their comfort zone and everything they knew about scripture and religious practice screamed, get out of there. But before we turn and run, listen to the way Mark describes this man. **This man lived among the tombs, and no one was ever strong enough to restrain him, even with a chain. He had been secured many times with leg irons and chains, but he broke the chains and smashed the leg irons. No one was tough enough to control him. Night and day in the tombs and the hills, he would howl and cut himself with stones.** And after reading that, I thought – this is someone's child. What if this was my child or your child? And isn't this at least God's child? I cannot even imagine the pain he must have experienced, and maybe the worst pain was the rejection. But Jesus didn't turn back, and instead he asked "What is your name?"

And the man responded, “Legion.” But that was not really the man responding. It was a lifetime of pain from which Jesus would set him free.

This space is surrounded by stained glass windows that tell the story of Jesus. At least once a week, I will walk into this sanctuary and look at the windows. My two favorites are these. One of the resurrection window that I call, Christ in us – the power of love that is even stronger than death, and the other, I call Christ through us which is reaching the poor, the stranger, the sick, those who are marginalized. Every Sunday, when I stand here, I look at those two windows before I speak a word. The windows remind me of my Wesleyan heritage. John Wesley was a 17<sup>th</sup> century preacher and teacher at Oxford University who began a revival movement that brought together the work of Christ in us with the work of Christ through us. Bringing heaven here on earth. It’s what we pray every Sunday: thy kingdom come. It’s what sent the Methodists to the people who were hurting, and Wesley started clinics and schools, published books, went into prisons to serve the poor. It’s also what we do here. It’s why a child care center was started 19 years ago and why it is expanding to a second location this spring. We’ve recognized the need for early childhood learning for children of all income levels. We respond to people who are hurting. It’s why we are collecting food this month. A few years ago, when hate-filled language was directed toward Muslims, we invited someone from the mosque in this community to come speak with us. That kind of language prompted women at Messiah and in our community to start an interfaith dialogue that would develop friendships. When we were hearing hate-filled language about Mexicans and Latino people in our country, we worked at building a relationship with Iglesia Piedra Viva – praying with them, assisting in their outreaching, and providing financial support. When immigrants felt under attack, we sponsored the Agid family so that they could immigrate to the Twin Cities. When we saw an unmet need in Kenya with teenaged moms who had no place to turn, we stepped in to start Imara International. These and many other efforts are an extension of our Wesleyan heritage and the call that we hear when Jesus crossed to the other side to meet hurting people that no one would touch.

Every four years, delegates from United Methodist Churches around the world gather to revise the church’s Book of Discipline which details the governance policies of the church. In the late 1960s and early 1970s there were riots in New York City and other places in response to the treatment of gay and lesbian people. They were tired of being mistreated and marginalized. And to stand up for this population, when the Methodists met in 1972, a statement was presented which said homosexuals no less than heterosexuals are people of sacred worth and their rights should be protected. At the time, this was a bold statement – a Jesus-crossing-to-the-other-side kind of statement. But then others proposed an additional statement that “the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.” And for the next 44 years, every time the General Conference met, the delegates have been fighting about the second statement. And along the way other restrictions were added: a pastor may not perform same-sex marriages and churches could not be used for same-sex weddings, and then persons could not be ordained if they were in a same-sex relationship. Each time this has brought more hurt and pain to persons who identify as gay and lesbian. And after 44 years, it’s as if this debate has consumed all the oxygen in the room and after the General Conference meeting in February, both sides in this debate have said we are done arguing about this. There are no winners and still there are hurting, marginalized people.

The crux of the “conversation” is “Is homosexuality a sin?” That’s where there is a deep divide with both sides turning to scripture and understanding the scripture very differently. There are five verses in the Bible that mention homosexuality. I’ve wanted to make room for different interpretations but as long as we can treat people with love and respect and as long as you realize your pastor doesn’t agree with you. Which is okay, even Amanda and I do not agree on

everything and somehow we've spent 37 years together. And the people I know don't hate gay and lesbian people and don't want people mistreated but want to love. I don't believe the Bible is saying it is a sin. I could be wrong, and I am prepared to answer for that one day if necessary. I think the two verses from Leviticus are condemning sexual assault and not homosexuality. I think verse in Deuteronomy is about temple prostitution. And even if I take these three verses literally, there are many other laws from scripture that we do not consider to be the will of God today. None of us would support executing disobedient children, but that is commanded in the Bible.

In Romans, I think Paul is contrasting natural and unnatural (i.e. clean and unclean – a distinction that Christians no longer observe). Paul could be referring to idolatry or temple prostitution or even pederasty (practice of older men taking a young student as a lover – a practice we would still condemn today). Furthermore, Jesus never mentions homosexuals. He does say that someone who gets divorced and remarried is committing adultery – something most Christians have found a way to interpret differently. And of course, Paul teaches that women should keep silent in the church and always be subservient to men. In other words, it is problematic when we start taking everything in the Bible literally. Therefore, I think we look for what are timeless truths and that's where we stake our faith. And if I am going to err, I will err on the side of treating people as Jesus did.

Having read and researched and prayed, that's where I am. I also have friends and family in same sex marriages who have children and they are among the most Christian families that I know. You don't have to agree with me. I love all of you. I want all of you to be part of this church. I've devoted the past 19 years as your pastor trying my best to communicate that. I've always seen myself as pastor of all – even when we've disagreed. I just want people who come here to know they are loved and they are in a church that will love them unconditionally. Because if not, we do not make room for what God can do in people's lives. And I want our community to be able to look at Messiah Church and say, "see how they love."

As for the United Methodist Church, I am certain we will see new ways of governing ourselves come forward in the next year. The General Conference meets again in May 2020 and this time in Minneapolis. Until then, the denomination does not define us. The love of Jesus Christ does, the kind of love that would send a boat-load of disciples into uncharted territory just to love one of God's children who was hurting. It's why you saw the signs as you entered – Everyone is welcome here – and I mean that with everything that is within me.

Last Saturday, two children from this church stood outside their home with a cocoa stand. They called it "Cocoa for a Cause." They wanted to raise money to feed those in our community without enough food. Their parents offered to match what they raised. In a couple of hours, they raised \$350 which was more than their parents were prepared to match so they compromised at \$500. In our church family, when we hold hands at the end of worship, it is an incredible thing for me to see. You may not know it but among us are those who donate to the food shelf and those who receive from the food shelf. We have some very well-to-do persons and persons who have turned to their church to help them pay their mortgage. We have immigrants, persons who have been to prison, persons who have been homeless, persons who are hurting very deeply. We even have homosexual and heterosexual persons among us. All joining hands. All seeking the kingdom of God in their lives. And I have to believe that gives God great praise.

## **Grow, Pray, Study for Week of March 24, 2019**

**Weekly Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you know the ways in which we struggle and the times when we resist the hard work you want to do in our lives. By your power, help us to move forward in the light of your hope. Let your grace be the breakthrough that we need to experience your Kingdom and bring your message of love to the world. Amen.

### **He had compassion on them**

#### **Monday, March 25**

##### **Scripture: Mark 6:30-44**

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him everything they had done and taught. Many people were coming and going, so there was no time to eat. He said to the apostles, "Come by yourselves to a secluded place and rest for a while." They departed in a boat by themselves for a deserted place. Many people saw them leaving and recognized them, so they ran ahead from all the cities and arrived before them. When Jesus arrived and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then he began to teach them many things. Late in the day, his disciples came to him and said, "This is an isolated place, and it's already late in the day. Send them away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy something to eat for themselves." He replied, "You give them something to eat." But they said to him, "Should we go off and buy bread worth almost eight months' pay and give it to them to eat?" He said to them, "How much bread do you have? Take a look." After checking, they said, "Five loaves of bread and two fish." He directed the disciples to seat all the people in groups as though they were having a banquet on the green grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. He took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them, broke the loaves into pieces, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. Everyone ate until they were full. They filled twelve baskets with the leftover pieces of bread and fish. About five thousand had eaten.

**Observation:** When Jesus met people with problems (illness, hunger or many other human challenges) he did not lecture them about what they'd done wrong, say God was teaching them a lesson, or try to duck responsibility for helping. When his disciples said, "Send these people away," Mark said Jesus' reply was "You give them something to eat." Jesus regularly showed compassion and a desire to make things better.

**Application:** Note the contrast between how Jesus responded to the crowd and how the disciples did. "You give them something to eat" seemed to alarm the disciples. When you see people hurting, are you more inclined to respond like the disciples or like Jesus? What concerns or fears, if any, do you have about what might happen if you more often responded to suffering with active compassion?

***Faith Group Discussion:*** Any gardener or farmer expects to harvest multiple ears of corn, bearing a few hundred kernels each, from planting one corn kernel. God built many miracles of multiplication like that into the natural world at creation. Jesus multiplied "seven loaves and a few fish" to feed 5,000 people—the same power at work, but in a more unusual, immediate way. How has God used miracles (usual, everyday ones or unusual ones) to sustain and fill your life?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, remind me that the good things that come into my life are not there just for me to hoard. Make me more responsive to your commands to bless others. Amen.

**It's me. Don't be afraid.**

**Tuesday, March 26**

**Scripture: Mark 6:45-56**

Right then, Jesus made his disciples get into a boat and go ahead to the other side of the lake, toward Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After saying good-bye to them, Jesus went up onto a mountain to pray. Evening came and the boat was in the middle of the lake, but he was alone on the land. He saw his disciples struggling. They were trying to row forward, but the wind was blowing against them. Very early in the morning, he came to them, walking on the lake. He intended to pass by them. When they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost and they screamed. Seeing him was terrifying to all of them. Just then he spoke to them, "Be encouraged! It's me. Don't be afraid." He got into the boat, and the wind settled down. His disciples were so baffled they were beside themselves. That's because they hadn't understood about the loaves. Their hearts had been changed so that they resisted God's ways.

When Jesus and his disciples had crossed the lake, they landed at Gennesaret, anchored the boat, and came ashore. People immediately recognized Jesus and ran around that whole region bringing sick people on their mats to wherever they heard he was. Wherever he went—villages, cities, or farming communities—they would place the sick in the marketplaces and beg him to allow them to touch even the hem of his clothing. Everyone who touched him was healed.

**Observation:** After Jesus fed 5,000 people (Mark 6:33-44), he sought solitude for prayer. Prayer seemed to be the most renewing "break" activity in Jesus' life. But the disciples' little boat got into trouble in a strong wind on the lake. Jesus walked out to them to help. At first terrified, the disciples were glad when the wind settled down. But they "were so baffled they were beside themselves... because they hadn't understood about the loaves."

**Application:** What had the disciples not understood? In verse 50, Jesus seems to identify himself with the divine name I Am (see Exodus 3:13-15; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10-11). But even after watching Jesus feed 5,000 people, they didn't fully see that, in Jesus, God was here inaugurating God's kingdom. What helps you to trust Jesus to be with you during life's worst storms, in all his divine compassion and power?

**Faith Group Discussion:** Seeing Jesus walking on the lake, the disciples were terrified. It wasn't the lack of power that frightened them, but the idea of a power beyond their imagining. In C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Mr. Beaver said of Aslan the Lion (the book's Christ figure), "Course he isn't safe. But he's good." Do you ever find the idea of God actually "showing up" a bit scary? In what ways is Jesus "not safe"? What gives you confidence that "he's good"?

**Prayer:** Loving God, at times I'm comfortable with this world's broken ways. Then your power to change the world can frighten me. Make me secure in trusting that you are always good. Amen.

**Purify the inside, not the outside**

**Wednesday, March 27**

**Scripture: Mark 7:1-23**

The Pharisees and some legal experts from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus. They saw some of his disciples eating food with unclean hands. (They were eating without first ritually purifying their hands through washing. The Pharisees and all the Jews don't eat without first washing

their hands carefully. This is a way of observing the rules handed down by the elders. Upon returning from the marketplace, they don't eat without first immersing themselves. They observe many other rules that have been handed down, such as the washing of cups, jugs, pans, and sleeping mats.) So the Pharisees and legal experts asked Jesus, "Why are your disciples not living according to the rules handed down by the elders but instead eat food with ritually unclean hands?" He replied, "Isaiah really knew what he was talking about when he prophesied about you hypocrites. He wrote, This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me. Their worship of me is empty since they teach instructions that are human words. You ignore God's commandment while holding on to rules created by humans and handed down to you." Jesus continued, "Clearly, you are experts at rejecting God's commandment in order to establish these rules. Moses said, Honor your father and your mother, and The person who speaks against father or mother will certainly be put to death. But you say, 'If you tell your father or mother, Everything I'm expected to contribute to you is corban (that is, a gift I'm giving to God), then you are no longer required to care for your father or mother.' In this way you do away with God's word in favor of the rules handed down to you, which you pass on to others. And you do a lot of other things just like that." Then Jesus called the crowd again and said, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing outside of a person can enter and contaminate a person in God's sight; rather, the things that come out of a person contaminate the person." After leaving the crowd, he entered a house where his disciples asked him about that riddle. He said to them, "Don't you understand either? Don't you know that nothing from the outside that enters a person has the power to contaminate? That's because it doesn't enter into the heart but into the stomach, and it goes out into the sewer." By saying this, Jesus declared that no food could contaminate a person in God's sight. "It's what comes out of a person that contaminates someone in God's sight," he said. "It's from the inside, from the human heart, that evil thoughts come: sexual sins, thefts, murders, adultery, greed, evil actions, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, insults, arrogance, and foolishness. All these evil things come from the inside and contaminate a person in God's sight."

**Observation:** Ancient Jewish culture was extremely strict about purity laws, especially food laws. Jesus said it's not what goes into a person's body that is bad; it is what comes from within a person. He went further to show that many people's keeping of the Hebrew religious rituals had become empty and destructive. The most hurtful, defiling stuff, he said, comes from inside, from the human heart apart from God's guidance.

**Application:** To people devoted to carefully following the Old Testament food laws, Jesus' statement was shocking: "Nothing outside of a person can enter and contaminate a person in God's sight; rather, the things that come out of a person contaminate the person." God's main concern is your heart's motives and your relationship with God. What helps you to focus your primary energy and concern on the state of your heart, rather than on trying to make your outward behaviors look good?

***Faith Group Discussion:*** In verse 21 Jesus said, "It's from the inside, from the human heart, that evil thoughts come." God covers us with grace, and the Holy Spirit bears fruit in our lives. But God doesn't change our hearts without our collaboration, working with him to shape our thoughts and actions. How can you keep religious rituals from becoming empty forms, just done for the sake of doing them? Which faith rituals truly draw you closer to God?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, continue changing and renewing me from the inside out. Teach me each day how to make my heart one from which your qualities of life flow out. Amen.

**Jesus ministered outside of Israel's borders**

**Thursday, March 28**

**Scripture: Mark 7:24-37**

Jesus left that place and went into the region of Tyre. He didn't want anyone to know that he had entered a house, but he couldn't hide. In fact, a woman whose young daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit heard about him right away. She came and fell at his feet. The woman was Greek, Syrophenician by birth. She begged Jesus to throw the demon out of her daughter. He responded, "The children have to be fed first. It isn't right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." But she answered, "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." "Good answer!" he said. "Go on home. The demon has already left your daughter." When she returned to her house, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

After leaving the region of Tyre, Jesus went through Sidon toward the Galilee Sea through the region of the Ten Cities. Some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak, and they begged him to place his hand on the man for healing. Jesus took him away from the crowd by himself and put his fingers in the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. Looking into heaven, Jesus sighed deeply and said, "Ephphatha," which means, "Open up." At once, his ears opened, his twisted tongue was released, and he began to speak clearly. Jesus gave the people strict orders not to tell anyone. But the more he tried to silence them, the more eagerly they shared the news. People were overcome with wonder, saying, "He does everything well! He even makes the deaf to hear and gives speech to those who can't speak."

**Observation:** Hard on the heels of teaching about what was truly unclean in God's sight, as opposed to what outer ceremonial rules deemed unclean, Mark showed Jesus acting on that principle with a non-Israelite woman many would have thought unclean. (Matthew wrote an expanded version of Jesus' dialogue with the desperate mother - Matthew 15:21-28). Then Jesus healed a man's hearing and speech, a miracle that evoked memories of Isaiah 35:5-6, a passage that anticipated God's love bringing renewal and deliverance.

**Application:** Look up Tyre on a map of ancient Israel. Jesus went well outside Israel's boundaries, into modern Lebanon, when he met this Canaanite woman and healed her daughter. Ephesians 2:14-16 said one outcome of Jesus' ministry was to break down barriers between people. When has Jesus brought healing to strained and broken relationships in your life?

***EXTRA for Faith Group discussion:*** After seeing Jesus restore a man's power of hearing and speech, Mark said "people were overcome with wonder." In his commentary, N. T. Wright said that in urging people to follow Jesus, Mark "envisages, not a boring life of conventional religion, but things happening that would make people astonished. If we're still too deaf to hear what he's saying, the problem is perhaps with us rather than with the message." However long you've followed Jesus, what things help keep alive a vital sense of wonder and astonishment in you?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, preserve (or deliver) me from any sense of boredom or tedium as I follow in your footsteps. Keep my heart alive to the awe your presence inspired when you walked this earth. Amen.

**Another large crowd—of Gentiles this time**

**Friday, March 29**

**Scripture: Mark 8:1-21**

In those days there was another large crowd with nothing to eat. Jesus called his disciples and told them, "I feel sorry for the crowd because they have been with me for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they won't have enough strength to travel, for some have come a long distance." His disciples responded, "How can anyone get enough food in this wilderness to satisfy these people?" Jesus asked, "How much bread do you have?" They said, "Seven loaves." He told the crowd to sit on the ground. He took the seven loaves, gave thanks, broke them apart, and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they gave the bread to the crowd. They also had a few fish. He said a blessing over them, then gave them to the disciples to hand out also. They ate until they were full. They collected seven baskets full of leftovers. This was a crowd of about four thousand people! Jesus sent them away, then got into a boat with his disciples and went over to the region of Dalmanutha. The Pharisees showed up and began to argue with Jesus. To test him, they asked for a sign from heaven. With an impatient sigh, Jesus said, "Why does this generation look for a sign? I assure you that no sign will be given to it." Leaving them, he got back in the boat and crossed to the other side of the lake.

Jesus' disciples had forgotten to bring any bread, so they had only one loaf with them in the boat. He gave them strict orders: "Watch out and be on your guard for the yeast of the Pharisees as well as the yeast of Herod." The disciples discussed this among themselves, "He said this because we have no bread." Jesus knew what they were discussing and said, "Why are you talking about the fact that you don't have any bread? Don't you grasp what has happened? Don't you understand? Are your hearts so resistant to what God is doing? Don't you have eyes? Why can't you see? Don't you have ears? Why can't you hear? Don't you remember? When I broke five loaves of bread for those five thousand people, how many baskets full of leftovers did you gather?" They answered, "Twelve." "And when I broke seven loaves of bread for those four thousand people, how many baskets full of leftovers did you gather?" They answered, "Seven." Jesus said to them, "And you still don't understand?"

**Observation:** Mark's purpose, in telling this story (not long after Mark 6:30-44), was not merely to say, "Jesus did it again!" This event likely took place in the region of the Ten Cities, the Decapolis (Mark 7:31), and if so, most of the 4,000 would have been Gentiles. Jesus fed them as bountifully and as caringly as he did the Jewish crowd in chapter 6. Yet when he tried to use the image of yeast to warn his disciples against teachings different from his, they took him with an almost silly literalism.

**Application:** Acts 11:1-3 and 15:1-6 show that some early Christians, trained in the Jewish faith, found it hard to accept Gentiles as full citizens in God's Kingdom. How would Mark's stories of Jesus miraculously feeding two crowds, one Jewish and one Gentile, point toward God's view of that issue? Are there any people who, for whatever reasons, you aren't sure "fit" in God's family today?

**Faith Group Discussion:** What was "the yeast of the Pharisees," and "the yeast of Herod"? The Pharisees wanted a Messianic kingdom set up just for law-keeping Jews; Herod and company wanted a political kingdom that treated them as legitimate kings. Jesus' vision was different from both, higher and more expansive, and he wanted his disciples to "get it." How do you see Jesus' kingdom (for which we pray each week in worship)? Have there been times when Jesus' actions and teachings expanded your sense of the kingdom's reach and impact?



**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, it seems all your disciples could see in your feedings of large crowds was fish and bread. Help me focus my attention on your life-changing power and compassion, on your kingdom that is higher and greater than anything I could imagine. Amen.

### **It can take time to see clearly**

**Saturday, March 30**

#### **Scripture: Mark 8:22-33**

Jesus and his disciples came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to Jesus and begged him to touch and heal him. Taking the blind man's hand, Jesus led him out of the village. After spitting on his eyes and laying his hands on the man, he asked him, "Do you see anything?" The man looked up and said, "I see people. They look like trees, only they are walking around." Then Jesus placed his hands on the man's eyes again. He looked with his eyes wide open, his sight was restored, and he could see everything clearly. Then Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village!"

Jesus and his disciples went into the villages near Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They told him, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others one of the prophets." He asked them, "And what about you? Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: "The Human One must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts, and be killed, and then, after three days, rise from the dead." He said this plainly. But Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him. Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, then sternly corrected Peter: "Get behind me, Satan. You are not thinking God's thoughts but human thoughts."

**Observation:** Clarity about Jesus' mission comes only after confusion. Right after the story of the blind man's healing, Mark showed Peter's great confession of Jesus as "the Christ" (the anointed one in Greek, equivalent to the Hebrew "Messiah"), followed immediately by Peter's confused effort to "correct" Jesus' explanation about what it meant to be the Christ. Glimpsing the truth, but only in a fuzzy image "like trees...walking around," Peter couldn't yet grasp that Jesus truly meant that his mission involved rejection, suffering and execution.

**Application:** The gospels said Jesus faced temptation right at the start of his ministry. Those temptations were meant to make Jesus into the kind of "Christ" who would fit people's expectations and wishes. So when Peter "took hold" of Jesus to correct him, Jesus recognized the voice of Satan. Jesus exposes an evil force behind Peter's response. The problem is that Peter denied that Jesus' mission as the Christ includes suffering. He isn't thinking from God's point of view. In what ways has your understanding of Jesus and his mission become clearer over time? Are you willing to follow a king whose path to God's eternal kingdom went straight through suffering and crucifixion, not around them?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, open my heart to think God's thoughts, not human thoughts, about what it means for me to follow you and serve your kingdom. When that takes courage, give me that courage. Amen.