Date: 16.2.20

Text: Mark 1:16-45

Title: Competing voices

Place: Swansea/Charlestown

File: Mark 1b

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Slide 1

Each day each one of us have to make decisions about what we are going to do with our time. There are just 24 hours in the day and I am sure that we could all fill every one of those hours, even if we didn’t spend some of them sleeping. Because each day we have in our heads competing voices demanding our attention.

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For example I come to knock off time from work and one voice in my head says ‘that project you were working on, you could get it close to finished if you just gave it another hour or two.’ And yet another voice says ‘have you checked your mobile or your emails since lunchtime you really ought to do that before you clock off’. Then there is another voice, ‘Kaylene would appreciate it if you cooked dinner tonight.’ And another ‘you might ask the kids how their day has gone?’ Yet another ‘no one has yet taken the dog for a walk today.’ And probably the loudest voice of all says, ‘Stephen you have worked hard today. You really should put your feet up and go and watch the news’.

So which voice are we going to listen to? What is our number one priority at this point in time? And how are we going to make our decision about what to do and what not to do?

Now, let me reassure you here. I don’t always get my priorities right myself. I often fail to balance all the competing voices in my head. I often try to please everyone and end up failing miserably. But if you are like me, then maybe we need to turn to the gospels and see how Jesus copes with his competing priorities and maybe that will help us to better work out our priorities.

Slide 3

For last week in Mark 1, we saw that Jesus had just started his public ministry. He had preached his first sermon, “*The time has come. The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news*.” He chooses his first disciples. He reels in a couple of fishermen and tells them to follow him. And they do that. And so they head down the road to Capernaum.

Slide 4

1. **Releasing (verses 21-28)**

*21 “They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.****22****The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.****23****Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out…”*

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You see Jesus starts his public ministry by preaching. Going to his local synagogue and expanding God’s word. For that’s what a prophet does, it is all about God’s word. That’s what a teacher should do, take God’s word and bring it to God’s world. But straight away this thinking is challenged. Immediately other people have other ideas. And notice who stops Jesus from preaching? An impure spirit.

Slide 6

For yes inside the congregation of God’s people was an evil spirit. A henchman of the evil

one. There he is taking part in the worship service. Satan doesn’t just do his work outside of God’s people, sometime he infiltrates our meetings. And here we see the evil one taking the initiative. ***24****“What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”* ***25****“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!”****26****The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek”.*

Slide 7

No one else on that day saw that Jesus was the holy one of God. No one else apart from this unclean spirit. So he draws people’s attention away from what Jesus was saying to what the unclean spirit is saying. Away from God’s word to the devil’s word. Don’t you find that interesting? Especially as this unclean spirit seems to be telling the truth. Jesus is the Holy one of God. Actually Jesus is God. Jesus has come to destroy evil and the evil one. In fact Jesus shows his power, he demonstrates his authority in this story by doing just that.

Jesus speaks sternly. Be quiet. Come out of him. And the spirit obeys. It obeys. The power of this spirit is great for it has controlled this man completely but Jesus releases him from the strong man’s grip. He frees him from Satan’s power. He gives this man’s life back to him.

Slide 8

So is that Jesus priority? To destroy the devil! To defeat evil? To get rid of everything that is wrong, biased, twisted, ugly, out of God’s perfect world and instead replace it with goodness, love, peace and harmony? We would like that wouldn’t we as humans? We don’t want to see war, poverty, or evil run riot, do we? And here Jesus has the chance to do that. To one by one confront those people, those societies, those institutions, those structures that are controlled by the evil one and wipe them off the face of the earth.

He could do it, couldn’t he? He is the Son of God, God’s very voice proclaimed that earlier in Mark 1. He is the Holy One of God, says the demons, and being holy, true, right, faithful means that he has to defeat evil, sin, possession and misery doesn’t he? Slide 9

You see right at the beginning of his ministry Jesus is experiencing competing voices. Is he here to preach, to declare that God’s kingdom is just about to break in or is he here to get rid of evil and to defeat the evil one? Should he stop the sermon and quieten the evil one or keep the sermon going and allow the evil one to set the agenda? Well the next incident complicates matters even more. Maybe he is here on earth instead to cure the sick.

Slide 10

1. **Healing (verses 29-34)**

***29 “****As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew.****30****Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her.****31****So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them”.*

Jesus goes from an evil spirit to a mother in law! Some might say out of the frying pan and into the fire. But I wouldn’t say that. What I would say is that if you type mother in law into your search engine you won’t believe what comes up. But I am not going to go there either!

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For this is not a joking matter. Simon’s mother in law has a high fever & so Jesus goes to her and he knows he has the power to heal her and he could do that in any way he wanted and so notice what he does. He holds her hand. He helps her up. Isn’t that a picture that paints a

thousand words? For it shows Jesus love, care, concern for someone who is sick.

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Jesus holds her hand and he helps her up and the fever leaves her. It’s gone! She’s better. And so she gets up and waits upon them. That’s amazing, isn’t it? No medicines. No course of pills. Just a touch of the hand and she is immediately well. Jesus then has not just the power to release people from the devils grip, he even has the authority to heal people from the diseases that afflict them. For he has power over not just a fever.

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Because ***32 “****That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed.****33****The whole town gathered at the door,****34****and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was”.*

Slide 14

Just imagine the scene, as the day ends and the stars shone out of the Middle Eastern sky, the entire community began to assemble outside Peter’s door. Slowly they came, some hobbling, some shuffling, some struggling bearing the weight of a brother or husband. The blind, the deaf, the lame, the demon-possessed; every age and ailment made their way to Jesus. And one by one, hour-by-hour Jesus must have worked a gentle touch, a quiet word, and a powerful presence. The message of the coming kingdom enrobed in human flesh.

Jesus heals them all. And he tells the demons to say nothing. Nothing at all. Because they know what this means. For funnily enough the devil knows his Scriptures. And the Scriptures say that this is a sign that the Messiah has come. The chosen One from God. And Jesus doesn’t want that sort of news to come from such unreliable sources. Not yet anyway.

Slide 15

So maybe that should be Jesus priority? Imagine that! Curing the world of all sickness! No birth deformities. No polio, measles, mumps. No cancer, tumours, AIDS, dementia. No bad backs, no mental illness, deafness or blindness. It would be amazing wouldn’t it? And anyone like Jesus might be able to cure people now and then bless a few handkerchiefs for the future, so that from now on there is nothing but good health in the whole world.

That would be a good thing for God to do, wouldn’t it? Heal every sickness known to man. Yes and get rid of the destructive influence of the evil one. That will bring people back to God won’t it? That will ensure your popularity. That will put praise to the Lord back on people’s lips! And I’m sure that Jesus is tempted to go down that path.

Slide 16

The competing voices are now competing shouts. Each telling Jesus to heal this person or to deliver them from this situation. The commotion would have been deafening. But Jesus knows it’s not popularity that is important but faithfulness. And it’s not the crowds that he is trying to please but his Father God in heaven. So that is where Jesus turns next.

Slide 17

1. **Preaching (verses 35-39)**

And so at the end of a hectic day of ministry, he is finally able to catch some sleep. But he doesn’t hit the sack for too long, because ***35 “****Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed”.*

Most of the time when we read this passage and other passages like this, where it says Jesus went to a lonely place to pray, we think of a quiet, peaceful time. A time to collect thoughts and recharge batteries. However, I would like to suggest that this was far from the point. It was not a peaceful time, but a time of soul searching, a time of turmoil, a time of decision. It was a time for Jesus to focus in on the mission His Father called him to do.

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What were his priorities? To teach? To heal? To defeat evil? To stay on the path that God had set him or help the people who were all around him? To do what God wanted him to do or to do what others wanted him to do? Jesus was at the crossroads, boy he had got to that first set of crossroads extremely quickly hadn’t he? Now he had to work out what to do next

Slide 19

It was Mother Teresa who observed, "God rarely is found in the midst of noise & restlessness. Instead, He is the friend of silence." The Psalmist in the Bible tells us (Ps 37:7), "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him." And elsewhere, the Psalmist tells us, (Ps 46:10), "Be still, and know that I am God." Jesus, while wrestling in prayer, finds out what his number one priority is. He works out what voice to listen to. It is God’s voice!

Slide 20

And I for one find that real encouraging and challenging. It's challenging because if Jesus needed to pray, do we really think we have no need to pray? If Jesus found the answer to his competing voices in prayer, do we think we will find the answers anywhere else than in talking and listening to God in prayer? You are a busy mum or Dad struggling with priorities are you regularly found with God in prayer? You are involved in ministries within the Church where do you get your inspiration and direction if not where Jesus got it in prayer? You are busy but really are you too busy not to pray?

Slide 21

***36 “****Simon and his companions went to look for him,****37****and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”* ***38****Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”*What’s Jesus priority, his No. 1 priority? The gospel. The message that God has sent him to preach. Repentance. Faith. God’s Kingdom. Yes healing people of their sickness is a good thing. Yes defeating the devil is a good thing. But it’s not the best thing. The best thing is to tell others about what God is doing in their world. And how they need to respond in repentance and faith.

Slide 22

Now this is really important for us as a church as we start a new year. For if Jesus priority was to preach the good news, surely it should be our priority to preach the good news. And yes there will be Churches all around us and even people who we respect talking to us saying our emphasis needs to be healing the sick so we should have a healing ministry. Or defeating evil and Satan so we should have a social justice ministry. Or we should just concentrate on building believers up in the faith or put all our eggs into our Sunday worship but Jesus voice is saying to us that at the heart of everything we are doing should be the preaching and teaching of God’s word.

Slide 23

That’s clear from the passage, crystal clear. Except, look at the next verse. ***39****So he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues*(that’s good!)***and driving out demons****”.* He didn’t just preach the gospel, he also wanted to free those who were trapped by the evil one as well. And what makes it even more complicated was that in the very next story he

cleanses a man who had leprosy.Slide 24

1. **Cleansing (verses 40-45)**

***40****A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”* ***41****Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!”****42****Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.*

Now leprosy was, and in some parts of the world today still is, a terrible disease to have. For if you have leprosy, you lose all sense of feeling in your hands and legs. Which means they can be easily burnt, maimed, disfigured because if something bad happens to you and you don’t realise it is happening, you don’t feel the pain! Dr Brand, a Christian missionary even tells the story that lepers in his village were having their toes and fingers eaten off by rats while asleep and it happened, because they couldn’t feel anything happening.

It also was a contagious skin disease so the leper was shunned and had to live on the edge of the town so that they wouldn’t infect anyone else. Well this leper does the wrong thing and instead of yelling out “Unclean” so that Jesus and his party would avoid him. He approaches Jesus and says if you are willing, you can make me clean. And Jesus doesn’t say no get away from me I don’t want to become unclean which would stop my ministry.

Nor does he say, no I’m only here to preach the gospel, go and see a doctor. No he reaches out his hand and touches the man. Jesus knows this man needs healing and love. Cleansing and acceptance. So with this one action, that speaks louder than words, Jesus cleanses him and communes with him. He shows God’s power and his love. Actually it’s more than that.

According to the law, that if someone who was clean touched someone or something that was unclean then that which was clean became unclean. But Jesus holiness, Jesus power, Jesus cleanliness is so strong, he doesn’t become unclean, the leper becomes clean.

Slide 25

Mark is really presenting it to us as a kind of model of what it means to be a Christian. It’s actually a marvellous picture of authentic Christianity. It is coming to Christ, on our knees as it were, in an acknowledgment of His Lordship, imploring Him for the help only He can give; acknowledging our desperate need, our uncleanness of soul. He can make us clean. Nothing else will touch the deep need of your soul. Nothing else can make you clean but Jesus.

Slide 26

***43 “****Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning:****44****“See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.”****45****Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere”.*

Do you notice what happens, their situations are reversed. Jesus now is the one who can’t go into town and the man can now enjoy a normal life. And that is because Jesus takes the man’s uncleanness, his sin, his defilement and eventually will take it all the way to the cross, so that the man can have Jesus cleanliness, his godliness, his life, so to speak.

Slide 27

So just because the priority is preaching the gospel doesn’t mean that we don’t care. It

doesn’t mean that we throw tracts at people and forget their physical needs. It doesn’t

mean that we don’t get involved with those who are sick, who are under the influence of evil, who are downtrodden, who are consumed with drugs or alcohol, who have made a real hash of their lives. Jesus shows us that the gospel needs to be proclaimed in words and actions. Grace is important but so is graciousness.

Slide 28

1. **Following (verses 16-20)**

And so when Jesus calls his first disciples he doesn’t just say to them, heal the sick or get rid of evil or even preach the gospel he says, “Follow Me!” Follow Jesus. So going back to the start of our passage in verse 16 we read that ***16****As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.* ***17****“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”*

Slide 29

And that is what they did. ***18 “****At once they left their nets and followed him”.* They left their family, they left their livelihood, they left their old way of life to follow Jesus. And Jesus priority was to be a fisher of men. To preach the good news. To bring people into the kingdom. To challenge them to avoid the coming nets of judgement. So he was taking them from what they know being a fisherman and saying use that for the kingdom. Fish for men.

Today he might say to the doctors and health professionals, bring health to men’s souls not just their bodies. To the gardeners he says tend the soil so that the word of God can grow in those around you. He says to teachers, teach others about the kingdom of God. To the mothers and father, help grow your children in the Lord. To the bus drivers, make sure you are taking people to heaven. To the accountants, your job is to add people to the kingdom.

Slide 30

And that was what he said to me, an accountant a number of years ago. Leave your job and follow me. Later leave your home and go to your first parish. Leave your family and friends and place your emphasis on the family of God. And each time that has happened there has been a cost, a great cost involved. And each time it has been well and truly worth it.

Slide 31

But the call is still for us to follow. Forget what is behind and strain your eyes to what is ahead. Don’t just rest on your laurels. Don’t just be satisfied with past obedience. For there is an urgency about Jesus call. And there is imperative for us to work hard at being fishers of men. Now what I find immensely frustrating is that when Jesus says to the leper be quiet, he speaks and when he says to you and me, speak and be fishers of men, we so often go quiet. But following Jesus means speaking for Jesus. Following Jesus means putting aside all the other priorities in our lives to put Jesus first. Always first.

Slide 32

So you come to the end of a busy day or a busy week. You come to a Saturday or a Sunday and you hear all the competing voices in our heads, what are we to do? Listen to the voice of Jesus. Listen to the word of God. Be found in prayer and in the word. And then get up and serve him. Serve him at work yes but at home. In your family and in your community. Preach the good news. Live the good news. Model the good news. By following Jesus. And by fishing for men. Any other response is not just second best. It is disobedience.

Slide 33

When the disciples left their nets and followed Jesus they didn’t know where he was going to take them. When we leave this place today we don’t know where Jesus is going to take us

either. But that doesn’t matter, we are not alone. We are following Jesus. And he knows

where we are going. And he will lead us along the way. All of us are called to follow Jesus and he will make us fishers of men.