

Title – Go Where You Are

Scripture – Mark 5:15-20

Introduction

Last week we started our new Series by asking a question.

- Are you helping those who do not know God take steps in His direction?

I want to start today with another question.

- What was the last recommendation you gave to someone?

We recommend all kinds of things. Restaurants, vacation destinations, Netflix series and coffee shops. A new coffee shop moved into Highland Park recently, and I quickly found myself sending anyone and everyone I knew who liked coffee. In fact, I recommend it to all of you, Coffee Speaks in Highland Park. I am also excited about another one set to open in Highwood. I'm sure I will be recommending it in no time!

I don't know about you, but I take my recommendations very seriously. If I am going to recommend something to someone, I want them to enjoy it as much as I have. For me, it needs to be a sure thing. You won't find me recommending to many people they should be Mets fans...unless you want more frustration than enjoyment.

We even recommend churches. Some of you are in Church today because of a recommendation someone gave you to check out Christ Church. Maybe it was the worship, the preaching (I'm not the normal preacher), Lighthouse Kids, or the welcoming people.

There is recommendation we often keep to ourselves though. Something we get very timid about talking about. By now you know we are in a series about loving others and proclaiming the Good News.

We are talking exploring part three of our what it looks like to follow Jesus: love God, serve others and reach one. How can we engage with those around us and see one of them reached and begin discovering life with God?

Today we want to focus in on recommending the new life you have experienced in Jesus. I want to lay out before you God's call to go where you are and tell people how Jesus has changed your life.

Maybe you are here today, and you have not experienced the life change of following Jesus. Listen closely this morning as we look at the stories of people whose lives were changed and maybe today you need to decide to go all in on following Jesus yourself!

Scripture Setup

Let's take a closer look a few verses today, if you have your Bibles turn to Mark 5:18-20.

To set up these verses, let me give you an idea of what has been going on. In the chapters leading up to this story, the crowds following Jesus have been growing. Jesus also chose some disciples to follow him,

which was standard for a rabbi, in those times. He has begun to travel all over, teaching, meeting people and changing lives. Jesus and his disciples had just gotten off a boat where they were caught in a storm that freaked out the disciples, but Jesus simply calmed it with his words. That moment caused the disciples to be amazed, and somewhat fearful, at the power Jesus possessed.

At the beginning of chapter 5 they step off the boat, and are immediately met by a man who was demon-possessed. This was a man who was a slave to this demon, no one could subdue him and the neighbors were often trying to chain him down. The demon recognizes the power of Jesus approaching, and after a short interaction Jesus once again displays his power and casts out the demon.

We pick up in verse 15 after this man had just been freed of the demon by Jesus.

Point #1 – Jesus Changes Us

Mark 5:15 - people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid.

You can't miss the transformation in this story.

When the local townspeople show up, they see this guy...someone who had been tormenting them and someone they tried to chain and bound, just hanging out with Jesus and the disciples...IN HIS RIGHT MIND! They don't even know what to do with this guy anymore, and it causes them to be afraid.

Just as Jesus healed and changed this demon-possessed man, he changes us. The Good News we have to share, the Gospel message says that we can't change ourselves. We can't climb out of the hole we keep digging deeper. The Gospel message says God climbs down to get us.

Before Jesus, there as the Law. The Old Testament, do every little thing to try and be perfect" law. It didn't work, and it didn't save. In fact, we know now it was all about showing us just how far from perfect we are. But, the prophets started to look forward to a day where Jesus would change people.

Ezekiel 36:26 - And I will give you a **new** heart, and a **new** spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

God promised to do something new in us through Jesus.

That is why Paul wrote after Jesus:

2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new** creation. The old has passed away; behold, the **new** has come.

If anyone knew about having their life changed, it was Paul. Even his name changed. He went from Saul, the super-religious, Christian killing Jewish leader, who after having his life changed by Jesus became the Apostle Paul, the first missionary and the one who brought the Gospel to many unreached areas around the Middle East.

Jesus changes lives. We are freed from a slavery to sin, and given a new way to live. We get to live the way God created us to live!

Writing this sermon cause me to think about my own story, how would my life be different if I didn't have my life changed by Jesus. It started early for me, I am a Pastor's Kid, and I believed in Jesus at an early age. But, man has it been a lifetime of seeing Jesus change my life over time. From struggles with bullying as a child, to a gambling addiction as a college student to the daily struggle of laziness, selfishness and envy. Jesus time and time again shows up to remind me, that He is changing me. He has saved me and he has secured my eternity with God!

I have a story of Jesus changing my life. Many of you have a story of Jesus changing your life. For some, you find yourself in the same place as the townspeople. Confused.

You see life change, but you don't understand why. You hear about Jesus, but you are not experiencing the change yourself. For some, you need to take the step of faith to believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. For some of you, like me, you need to trust in the slow work of Jesus. I am reminded of a quote by C.S. Lewis:

“Day by day nothing changes, but when I look back, everything is different.”

This life change, this Gospel message, this Good News. It is one recommendation that is always a sure thing. When our friends, family, neighbors, coworkers meet Jesus, He can change their lives too.

When we come back to our story, we see Jesus getting into the boat preparing to leave and go to another town. Look at verses 18 and 19.

Point #2 – We Must Go

Mark 5:18-19 - As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. And he did not permit him but said to him, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”

No surprise, the man wants to go with Jesus. Jesus was the first person to help him and not chain him down. Who would want to stay in a town like that?

Jesus has a different idea, and I believe the words Jesus gives to the man, are the same words he gives to us. “Go home to your friends...”

That is the main idea behind this BBQ challenge that Pastor Mike introduced last week. On June 9th an many of us as possible will host BBQ's at our homes and invite our neighbors. No agenda, no projects, just looking to make friends with those who live closest to us. If you can't do it June 9th, pick another night this summer. But if you are free, make the invites, buy the meat and veggies, and fire up the grill. You can do it with some friends or on your own.

One of the easiest asks you can make to your neighbors this time of year is to come for a BBQ. Who doesn't love a good hot dog!

Here are 3 truths about our neighbors:

1. They don't prioritize Church
 - a. There is plenty of competition on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings now...and Church is not at the top of the list. The truth is, Church is not at the top of most of our lists. The newest stats say the average church attendance is 1.3 times a month!
2. They don't trust the Church
 - a. There have been enough scandals and media attention around the failures of the Church, that it has simply caused many to just see the church as not for them, but now many believe it is part of the problem in today's world.
3. They don't think about the Church
 - a. Ultimately though, the reality is most of your friends, neighbors and coworkers wake up on Sunday morning and don't give one thought to Church. They are not ignoring it, they don't even think about it.

With this new reality, I see Jesus' words to the demon possessed man as a fresh call to all of us. Go home to your friends. We can't expect our friends to just show up at Church. Some still do, but it is rare. If they aren't coming, and we aren't going...how can we share our story with others?

[Here is a video of one of our members, Brad Dickinson, and the impact a neighbor had on him.](#)

That is the second part of Jesus call. "...tell them how much the Lord has done for you."

Look at what Jesus did NOT tell this man to do:

- Convince people to believe
- Answer all their spiritual questions
- Explain the whole Bible
- Call out their sins

It is a quite simple command...just tell your story to your friends.

The truth is, we all have spheres of influence. We meet people and make friends. Barna just released these numbers, about where adults make their friends:

- Work – 42%
- Other Friends – 35%
- Neighborhood – 29%
- K-12 School – 28%

We all have spheres of influence where we meet people and make friends. We give these friends recommendations all the time. What would it look like if we started sharing our story of how Jesus has changed our own life!

Look at what happened in this man's town, in verse 20:

Mark 5:20 - And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

“Everyone marveled.” Of course, they did. The stories we can share about Jesus changing our lives will amaze people, because they are amazing stories.

If we, Christ Church, change our mindset, rather than our location. If we see the Church as all of us and not our buildings...if we start to go and share our stories of how Jesus changed our life, we will see our cities change.

Malcolm Gladwell observed how little things, under the right conditions, have the capacity to create a catalytic change that quickly spreads and influences others. He called it a tipping point. He observed that some beliefs, trends, or social behavior seem to cross a line and then explode like wildfire. It can be a fashion trend like Hush Puppy shoes – the manufacture was going to discontinue them in 1994, Then two hipsters started wearing them in Manhattan, a designer in Manhattan displayed the shoes; next a designer, Joel Fitzgerald, put a 25' inflatable basset hound on his store in Hollywood and a tipping point hit; some invisible line had been crossed – everyone wanted a pair...accept for some of us...who are not hip. Just saying...

Gladwell concluded that one KEY criteria of a Tipping Point is

“little actions can have a big effect”

Tim Keller, founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, a respected scholar and apologist, believes reaching 15% of Manhattan with the Gospel will create a tipping point that will not only impact New York City but create a catalytic – wildfire like effect – throughout the globe.

In a similar manner, getting to know and care for our neighbors and friends in meaningful ways – like Brad’s neighbor in the video – can have a ripple effect. It did in Brad’s life and the many he has touched.

Let me close with this final point. Point #1, Jesus changes you. Point #2, we must go.

Point #3 – We Must Pray

Don’t walk out of this service without a starting point. I want us to go and share our story with people. But, we pray first. Remember a second thing Mike spoke about last week – which we’ll go deeper into next week. Bless. It is a way of life...to seek to bless others, but it is also an acronym:

- B -begin with prayer
- L – listen with care
- E – eat with them
- S – serve them
- S – share your story

This will get unpacked much more next week, but I can’t talk about evangelism without talking about beginning with prayer. We would be foolish to try and do this on our own strength. Jesus changes lives, not me.

Next week we start a Church-wide prayer campaign.

When you come next week you will receive a handout that looks just like the graphic on the screen. 8 boxes for you to write the names of friends, family, coworkers and neighbors. These could be the same people you are inviting into your June 9 BBQ. But, as a Church we must begin to pray for the people around us.. Pray that they would soon discover life with God.

Pray that God would use you to possibly reach one of the people on your prayer card. Start thinking about the names of the people you pray for. All summer we will be praying to see people discover life with God.

Jesus was always on the go, changing lives and talking about God. But he never missed an opportunity to slip away and pray.

Prayer is a non-negotiable, and it is the most overlooked and forgotten part of following Jesus. I want to close with a story

Conclusion

We have been running the Thursday night service at Highland Park for about 6 months. We went into it wanting to create a space for non-Christians to come and want to come back. A place where we could have listen to a sermon and have open, honest discussion about Jesus, the Bible and life.

We pray every week before the service. One Thursday night I felt the burden to pray for someone I believed needed to have barriers broken down to believe in Jesus. I did not pray for anyone by name, bit simply said "Jesus, someone wants to believe in you, but needs a wall broken down." I did have people in mind, my neighbors and some past visitors.

That night went on as normal, until someone walked in after the service. They saw the lights on and wanted to talk to a pastor.

I ended up in my office with him, and he shared his own battle with a satanic experience and believing he had been possessed by a demon. This was a first for me, although I do know demons are very much real. I shared with him the truth of spiritual demons, and Jesus' power over them. Over the course of the next 30 minutes I explained the Gospel, and this young man took the step to believe in Jesus. We have been meeting to read the Bible together for the last several weeks.

I didn't know this guy before that night, but I know he is who I prayed for before the service.

Pray first, go second.

You will be asked to write down the names of people in your sphere of influence. People you will begin praying for, loving and sharing your story with over the course of the summer. This will all cultivate with an invitation to join us for the Fall Series, Discover Life with God.

Start thinking about who will be on your list, whose name will you write down next week.

Let us all begin to pray first, go second. Let us all pray that Jesus will change the lives of our friends and give us the courage to follow Him.