**MARK WEEK TWO**

**MARK 1 v 16-20:** So, Jesus had a mission and He had a message, but He recognised that He needed a core band of followers and, as with any Jewish Rabbi, he should have disciples. Generally, Rabbis would go into places of learning and pick out the very best of the twelve year olds to follow them, but Jesus chose the misfits, the rejects to do His work with Him.

There were many fishermen on the Sea of Galilee: Josephus, the great historian of that period, stated that 330 fishing boats sailed Galilee in his day and the large population in that area would have had fish as their staple diet. Fishermen used two kinds of nets: a trawl net, let down from the back of the boat and moved forward drawing the four corners together; and a much smaller net, shaped like an umbrella, which is what Peter and Andrew used here. When I went to Israel a couple of years ago, the Sea of Galilee and the surrounding area were beautiful, with fresh winds and very fertile soil.

Let's study these men whom Jesus picked as His first followers:

1. These men were not drawn from the religious elite, they were ordinary people. We should not think so much of what we are, but of what Jesus Christ can make of us! With these and some other similar men, God transformed the World!

2. These men were doing their days work when Jesus called them. The call of God can penetrate any situation, even when we are hard at work. The world, in effect, is full of God!

3. How did Jesus call them? ''Follow Me!''. It is very likely that they already knew of Jesus, heard His teaching, spoken to Him, were drawn to Him. Their discipleship began with a personal response to Him, a similar feeling to falling in love. Generally, people decide to follow Jesus not because of anything that He says, but because of who He is.

4. What did Jesus offer them? He offered them a task, a job. He called them to service, something which would become everything to them, spending their every last ounce of energy and eventually the path of martyrdom. We are not certain how John died, but James was the first martyr of the Church, killed with a sword by Herod (Acts 12 v 2). Simon Peter was crucified upside down and Andrew was also crucified on an X shaped cross (this is where the white cross on the Scottish flag originates).

**MARK 1 v 21, 22:** Let's look back at Mark's story so far, which has unfolded in a series of logical and natural steps. When Jesus heard the news of John's preaching and baptising, He had recognised His Father's call to action. He was baptised by John and received God's approval and all the necessary gifting. Jesus was then tested by the Devil- remember that the Holy Spirit had driven Him into the wilderness-and by so doing it honed His vision and goals. Then He had chosen His disciples and now the time had come to launch His campaign, so to speak. He chose to begin His campaign in a Synagogue, a place of worship. Synagogues were not exactly what churches are today:

1. It was primarily a teaching institution. When there were services on the sabbath they consisted of only prayer and the reading and exposition of God's Word. The Temple was the place for sacrifice.

2. It provided Jesus with the opportunity to deliver His message as there were no regular preachers in synagogues, the floor was open to any competent person who had something they wanted to say and the ruler of the synagogue was satisfied with them.

The people exclaimed that Jesus, when He taught, was not like the experts when they spoke. These were the scribes and their job was to interpret the Law of God both written and oral, but they never gave a decision on their own or without lots of references to Old Testament Scripture. Jesus taught with personal authority, He spoke as if He needed no authority beyond Himself!  Isn't it interesting that the listeners immediately recognised the teaching of Jesus as being like a breath of fresh air!

**MARK 1 v 23-28:** We read in the previous verses to this that those who heard the words of Jesus at the synagogue were amazed at what He said. When Jesus acted, they were astonished! In the synagogue there was a man in the grip of an unclean spirit and Jesus healed him. The Jews and all the Ancient World believed strongly in demons; for the Jews they connected them with the story in Genesis 6 v 1-8 (look up 2 Peter 2 v 4,5 to piece together the belief in fallen angels who continued to plague the world).  The demons were malignant beings, intermediate between God and human beings, who were out to do harm. The Jews reckoned that there were more than seven million of these demons who lived in the desert and were especially active in the midday heat and between sunset and sunrise. We may no longer believe in demons, but it is important to recognise that every Jewish person did. If you recall this as you read the stories of Jesus curing those demon-possessed it will help you understand more fully what these miracles meant to the Jews and how it altered their perception of who Jesus was.

There are still exorcists today, employed by the Anglican and Catholic Churches. I have listened to interviews with them and seen YouTube clips of their exorcisms. It is a dark world and one thing which struck me was that atheists won't become possessed, ''The devil doesn't worry about them'', one exorcist stated. No, it appears to be those marginally involved in the Christian faith with threadbare Christian understanding who are most vulnerable.

We can also read in this passage that the demon within the poor man knew who Jesus was and Jesus quieted it because He didn't want people being told by a demon; He wanted them to discover that He was the Holy One of God by themselves!

There are many today that assume that demons and their ability to possess human beings is pure imagination and those cured by Jesus were mentally ill. Firstly, we can say Praise the Lord that there was healing of whatever form! Secondly, Jesus clearly knew about demons and would speak to them as He did here. We might say that He did this because of the understanding by all the onlookers that it was demon possession and that the sufferer would only be made well if Jesus took this tack. I would say that the straightforward approach is at times the best in studying scripture, which in this example means that demons and demon possession were real and still are today.

**MARK 1 v 29-31:** Two things may well IMMEDIATELY impress themselves on your thoughts as you read this passage. One is the excitement that Mark brings to his story: things are happening and they are happening FAST! The second thing is a little window into the world of Jesus and His disciples. Peter's mother-in-law is sick, Jesus heals her at the request of the disciples and when she is made well, she 'attends to their needs'. It appears then that the group stayed at Peter's old home when they were in the neighbourhood. In another Gospel, Luke 8 v 1-3, we read that it was a group of wealthy women who provided for Jesus and the Twelve, presumably giving out of their wealth for food, shelter and enough room for them all to sleep!

So, in the synagogue Jesus had spoken and acted in the most amazing way. When the service ended, Jesus went with His friends to Peter's home. Now it may well have been that Jesus was exhausted after His preaching and miracle working- we read elsewhere that energy went out of Jesus when He healed, it cost Him. However, He was called to give of Himself again for others. Mother Teresa stated: ''Give and give until it hurts and then keep on giving'': this is what Jesus did, He gave Himself for human beings, not just on the cross, but throughout His ministry period. This miracle tells us something about three people:

1. Jesus. He did not require an audience to exert His power and the needs of others took precedence over His own need to rest. It is important to remind ourselves that Jesus did not heal to demonstrate how wonderful He was and to bring the maximum number of people to follow Him: He did it because He loved! It is also helpful to recognise that there were many exorcists around in this time, but they worked with lots of elaborate incantations and spells: Jesus spoke a couple of words and the person was healed COMPLETELY, IRREVERSIBLY, HOLISTICALLY.

2. The disciples. They had not known Jesus long, but they were already taking all their troubles to Him. We can 'take it to the Lord in prayer', anything and everything and He is always prepared to listen. Nothing is too great or small for Him, because He loves us.

3. Peter's wife's mother. No sooner was she better than she got on with helping practically. She used her recovered health for renewed service.

In the pantheon of the miracles of Jesus, this is mostly forgotten, but it gives us a beautiful glimpse into the person-centric love of Christ.

**MARK 1 v 32-34:** Jesus is full of Holy Spirit-filled compassion and power. The things which Jesus had done in Capernaum could not be concealed: imagine how things were for the person who was chronically ill or disabled in those days-doctors were costly and almost totally ineffectual- think of the woman with the issue of blood and Luke's comment on the state of things in that day-Luke 8 v 43, possibly only in the footnote- unless you were fortunate to have financial support, you were reduced to begging and many considered you an outcast, in this religious society it was assumed that you or your parents had done something badly wrong and that God was now punishing you!

So, the vast gathering of those who were sick and disabled descended on Jesus at Peter's house. They would have had to wait until evening on this sabbath day, as the Jewish Law forbade anyone carrying a burden through the town.

Three times we have seen Jesus healing people in this first chapter: He has healed in the Synagogue, healed in the house of His friends, and now He healed on the street, outside in front of many. The people flocked to Him, because they recognised that He was a man who could do things. He dealt not only in fine words and challenging thoughts, but also in deeds to match them. Through all the centuries, people have looked for an effective person; that is, someone who could transform their lives. Witness the crowds who attended the Billy Graham events and he would have admitted that he was just a poor quality of Jesus, although empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak words of truth and life into peoples' hearts. There has never been anyone like Jesus and never will be.

However, these first crowds came because they wanted something out of Him: they wanted the headaches to go, the blindness to be healed; the unclean spirit to be driven out, the legs to be made strong again. They can't be blamed for their attitude and many still have the same attitude today. It is only in a crisis that they turn to God, but this is not what God requires. He may bring healing because He is full of mercy and grace, but He wants a people who will be grateful and love wholeheartedly and sacrificially in return. What is the evidence you can bring to demonstrate your love for Him?