

Mark 1: 29-39

*<sup>29</sup> As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. <sup>31</sup> He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.*

*<sup>32</sup> That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. <sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered around the door. <sup>34</sup> And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.*

*<sup>35</sup> In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup> And Simon and his companions hunted for him. <sup>37</sup> When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." <sup>38</sup> He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." <sup>39</sup> And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.*



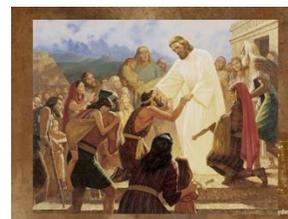
Three preachers were out for a day of fishing. It was slow, so the Methodist preacher says, "Hey guys, since we're not catching anything, why don't we pass the time by sharing our secret sins?" The Pentecostal preacher says, "I think that would be great!", but the Baptist preacher says, "I don't know... I think that's a bad idea." After a half

an hour of coaxing from the Methodist and Pentecostal preachers, the Baptist preacher finally agrees on the condition that he can go last. The Methodist begins, saying, "I know you guys won't believe this, but every Friday night I go to the bar in the next town over and get plastered!" The other two gasp aloud and then sit quietly. After about five minutes the Pentecostal preacher says, "Ok. My turn. For the last six months, I have been having an affair with another woman." The other two gasp loudly and then sit quietly. An hour passes, and the Methodist and Pentecostal preachers get impatient. "Brother, we told our secret sins; it's only fair that you share yours too." The Baptist preacher hangs his head, exhales deeply, and then says, "OK. You've got me. Here it is -- I am the worst gossip in the town, and I can't wait to get back home!"

For these three fishermen, well, probably at least two, felt relieved as they shared their secret sin. The burden of carrying their secret sin was like a weight upon them that could physically feel slip away as they confessed to one another. At points in all of our lives, we too have had secrets that we were keeping and it about killed us to do so. Now while our secrets may not have been as significant as the secrets of these imaginary preachers, once we were able to let them out, we too felt a wave of relief come over us. In a very similar manner, the people that Jesus was healing in our passage today also felt relief wash over them as Jesus healed them of their infirmities or drove the demons out of them. In spite of His best efforts to keep His identity a secret, people are flocking to Jesus as news of the miracles spread through the region. They come to experience His healing touch. Like we talked about last week, it is hard to keep a good thing secret. Jesus' teachings and the miracles are too good a thing not to share.

Our passage from Mark 1 today picks up where last week's passage from Mark 1 left off. It begins with Jesus leaving the synagogue and going to Simon and Andrew's house. We presume they went to the house at the end of the day for a time of rest. When they arrive, Jesus learns that Simon's mother-in-law is ill. Jesus goes to her and helps her up. As she gets out of bed, the fever leaves her and she is made well. Her illness may have been serious or it may just have been a little bug. We do not know. But we do know that she was temporarily residing outside of the family community while she was sick. She had to stay in her bed and was limited in her ability to interact and socialize with others. In this way, her healing brings her back into community.

As evening comes, people begin to arrive in droves to see Jesus. Yes, He may be an amazing teacher, but what draws them is the healing touch that Jesus offers. Just as Jesus has been working to keep His identity a secret, many of the people who come in need of healing are people who have been forced to live their lives in secret. Demon-possessed and ill people were commonly ostracized from the community. Lepers, for example, lived isolated lives in leper colonies that were scattered outside of the villages and cities. As Jesus touches and heals them, He frees them to rejoin society, to see their families and friends again. Just as it was with Simon's mother-in-law, as they are made whole and well again, the barriers are broken down, and the demon-possessed and the ill are released from living their lives in secret. With this freedom and release, they are now able to discover more about Jesus and to grow in their faith. Some of those healed will even choose to follow Jesus.

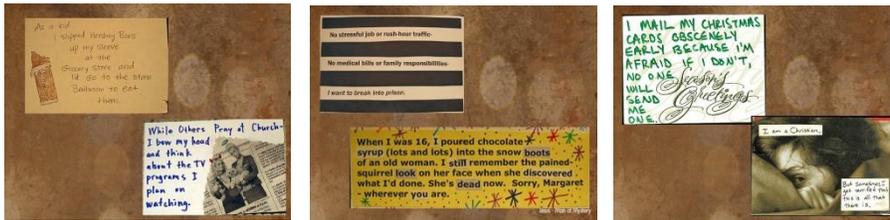




Earlier I shared the illustration about the three fishing preachers as a way to remind us how keeping secrets can burden us or make us feel trapped or can keep us isolated from others. Just as all of those who were healed were set free by Jesus, we too have felt a sense of freedom or relief when we have shared or released our secrets. Frank Warren is a man who lives in Washington, DC. One day he got a crazy idea to help people experience freedom from their deepest, darkest secrets. In many ways, it was similar to the "Before I die..." wall that I spoke of two weeks ago. Frank's project began with him handing out 300 self-addressed postcards asking people to share a secret they had never told anyone. Anonymous confessions came pouring in and eventually became part of an online project where Frank shared the secrets. This internet project is called the PostSecret Project.

Much like the "Before I die..." statements, the secrets that were shared run the gamut. Some were silly: "I give decaf to customers who are rude to me at Starbucks". Some were shocking: "Everyone who knew me before 9/11 believes I am dead". Some were soulful: "Dear birthmother, I have great parents. I found love. I am happy". Some were fearful: "When people I love leave voicemails on my phone I always save them in case they die tomorrow. Then I can hear their voice again". Some are kind: "I like to make mix CDs and leave them in random mailboxes".

Here are just a few of the postcards that Frank received:



[6 slides in all – leave each one up for 10-15 seconds...]

For the people who shared their secrets via a postcard, I am sure most of them felt a sense of relief the moment they dropped it into the mailbox. In the same way, each person that Jesus touched and healed during His ministry felt a sense of relief. Once they were made whole, once they were restored, they were freed to live as themselves again. They could move on past how they had been living and could begin to see the new possibilities that lay before them. They could now live with joy and hope. Life was full and vibrant. They were part of society and their faith community and their family once again. They were freed from living on the fringes of society.

What secrets are we holding onto that keep us from living fully? What shame do we need to release to step out of the shadows, out of the secret places? The truth is that Jesus already knows. He knows our secrets. To be freed, to begin living in full and joyful life that God has planned for each of us, we simply need to give our secrets, our guilt, our shame, our sins to Jesus. Today, through the sacrament of communion, we are invited to lay our sins down at the cross. So, come. Come to the table and lay your burdens down. Come to the table and be freed. Come and be welcomed back into relationship, back into community, back into grace. So, come. Come to the table.



[Communion...]

At this table, we find healing and wholeness. Through the body and the blood, we are washed clean; we are made new again. We are restored. In the last section of our scripture passage for today, Jesus rises early the next morning and finds a solitary place to pray. Jesus himself needs to be in communion with God as a means to refresh and recharge His soul. It is a good place of secret, of peace and quiet, for Jesus. But soon enough the disciples come and they find Him. The world is waiting. The world calls.

And so, it is with us. We leave this place of connection with God and we return to the world. Jesus went out into the neighboring towns to proclaim the message to all He met. Jesus found those living secret lives, those living lives apart from society, those trapped in their sin. Through His love and grace and healing, He brought all back into community and into a relationship with God. Today many people live secret lives, isolated lives, lonely lives, broken lives. There are a wide variety of things that lead to these places: addiction, pride, mental illness, family situation, physical or verbal abuse – just to name a few. It is to those such as these that we are called as we work out our mission to “bring people to Christ”.

Do you know someone who needs to be brought back? Do you know someone who needs to be freed from their secret life, from the barriers that keep them set apart, from the sins that weigh them down? Do you know someone that needs a saving relationship with God? If you do, help them to meet Jesus this week. Help them to be set free from the secrets so that they can know joy and peace and hope in their lives.

Just as Jesus went, may we go as well. May we go forth into the world this week, to share the good news of healing and wholeness that Jesus offers. May we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to all who need hope and healing in their lives. May we be His voice this week. May we bring others to Christ. Amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) How has releasing “things” to Jesus enabled you to grow in your faith? In what ways would sharing this with another help you grow some more?
- 2) We all have secrets and sins we carry. Ask God to bring you complete healing and wholeness from one of your secret sins.
- 3) What act of service can you offer another this week that helps them to see how Jesus cares for and loves them?