

Mark 1:40 – 2:17

Jesus comes for the broken

MiniTalk

Dinner party:

Meal for two.

Knives and forks, plates, tumblers, candle, napkins... seats

What's missing? Guest.

Pretty important. Who am I going to invite for dinner?

Maybe some suggestions. If it was you and you could invite one person to dinner someone you've not had dinner with before, who would you invite? *Take some suggestions.*

We're on the road with Jesus in Mark's gospel. And Jesus has been drawing some big crowds but it is more important for him to spend time with one or two people. And in today's reading Jesus chose a few people he wants to spend special time with. He doesn't choose famous celebrities, he doesn't choose people with great personalities, he doesn't choose people you could really guess at all. Here is how it goes.

13Once again, Jesus went to the shore of Lake Galilee. A large crowd gathered around him, and he taught them.

14As he walked along, he saw Levi sitting at the place for paying taxes, and Jesus said to him, "Come with me!" So he got up and went with Jesus.

Later, Jesus and his disciples were having dinner at Levi's house. Many tax collectors and other sinners had become followers of Jesus, and they were also guests at the dinner. Some of the teachers of the Law saw who Jesus was eating with and said "Why does he eat with people like this?"

They were very confused by Jesus. When he had a dinner party, he invited all kinds of people with all kinds of problems and he loved them.

And he said.

"Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? I didn't come to invite good people to be my followers. I came to invite sinners."

Who would you invite to dinner? Jesus invites people like you and me – people who know we're not perfect but want to come to Jesus and be helped.

Pray

Thank you Jesus that you love sinners and outcasts and that you don't want only hang out with perfect people. Please help us to come to you like a doctor and be healed. Amen.

Mark 1:40 – 2:17

Jesus comes for the broken

Main Talk - Eating with Jesus

Jesus and the leper, Jesus and the paralysed man, Jesus and the tax collector. The three stories this morning. Jesus comes for the broken. You have that open in front of us, let me pray for us that Jesus would shine his light onto the page so we'd understand.

Lord Jesus you are with us...by your spirit, speak these words to us by your living power we ask. Amen.

> You can tell a man by the company he keeps – so the saying goes. Well then, what do we make of Jesus? Jesus lived and taught the most pure, and uncompromising way of life ever conceived and Yet He was known universally as 'the Friend of sinners'.

What does that say about Him? It's a question that hung over Jesus His whole life. Look at chapter 2 and verse 16: they are at this dinner party

¹⁶ When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw [Jesus] eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked His disciples: "Why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus keeps company with rotten sorts of people. The poor, the weak, the unclean, the outcasts – the sinners! Why? What does this say about Jesus? And what does it say about us - His followers?

Because Jesus' response in verse 17 is telling:

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Effectively Jesus is saying: Yes I keep company with sinners. Because I'm the spiritual doctor and these are my patients. In fact, says Jesus, I **ONLY** keep company with sinners. "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners." In a sense, Jesus *only* eats with sinners.

This morning we're going to look at these three stories from Mark. (It's not a day in the life of Jesus as last week was, it is three separate incidents, which Mark brings together because they have a common theme which tells us more about who this King is, who has come to bring in his kingdom.) It's about three outcasts who meet Jesus. A leper, a paralytic and a tax collector – they are total outsiders who end up receiving the grace and power and cleansing of Jesus. At the same time, there are these religious insiders – called the Pharisees and the teachers of the law – are frozen out of the kingdom.

Jesus turns our expectations on their head. Here is the Lord God Almighty walking the earth and He does **NOT** keep company with the good – he says I've not come for the righteous – instead he keeps company with the bad.

What does this say about Jesus? What does it say about you and me who keep company with him?

Let's dive into the first story. 1v40:

A man with leprosy came to Jesus and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."

Only recently have they found a cure for leprosy. Leprosy in the first century destroyed your life and cut it short. It disfigures you, you lose fingers and toes. This man would have looked a complete mess coming to Jesus. Part of why he would have looked a mess is

because the Old Testament law required lepers to look a mess. Leviticus 13 says this:

⁴⁵ "The person with (leprosy) must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' ⁴⁶ As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp. (Lev 13:45-46)

Leprosy made you a spiritual and social outcast. You were unclean – and if people touched you, they became unclean. So you were commanded to live away from towns and cities. You were destined to be a spiritual and social outcast and there was really no hope of cleansing.

□ I came across this in Thailand. Until very recently those with leprosy would leave the cities and form their own community in rural areas. After all, who wants to be exposed to the infection, open sores on face and body, the smell of decay of rotting skin. In the periods of the black death, the plague whole cities would be quarantined to protect those kinds of infection from spreading from person to person.

Well what will happen in Mark 1, when *this* unclean man approaches Jesus? Because here He is meeting the LORD of Israel. The One who could condemn Him. And all the religious types would have expected Jesus to drive this man away – to drive him back outside the camp. To shout out 'Unclean! Unclean!', to reject and shame him. But what does Jesus do?

⁴¹ Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.

This is the very reverse of all religious expectation. Religion expects that this man's uncleanness will travel from the unclean man up Jesus hands and infect Jesus. Jesus turns that on its head. Jesus infects the man. *He* gives the unclean man a good infection.

Can you imagine the scene Jesus reaching out and touching his wet sores, touching his face, and hands. But healing his sores and cleansing his bones. That's what Jesus does here.

He reaches out and touches a man who almost certainly had not felt human touch in a very long time. And far from the man infecting Jesus, Jesus infects the man with cleansing. Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.

Now from v44, Jesus tells the man to go to the temple because there are some Old Testament sacrifices designed for just this situation. The leper was supposed to present two live birds to the priests. One of which was killed and its blood was shed and it dripped onto the other bird who was released. One dies the other goes free.

And it was essentially saying that uncleanness deserves death, but in the sacrifice this bird dies in your place. And because of that death you go free. That is what the sacrifice is picturing.

But this leper doesn't do the sacrifice Jesus asks Him too. There are no sacrifices in Mark's gospel. Apart from one. Roll onto the end of Mark's gospel a bloody sacrifice, Jesus dying on the cross. But what is happening is that on the cross he is fulfilling all the sacrifices of the OT. His blood is being shed so we can go free. He the Lord God almighty was dying outside the city gates, he was considered unclean – hung up on a tree outside the camp along with all the lepers. He was in the words of Isaiah, 'like one from whom men hide their faces.' Jesus died the death of the unclean, the spiritual

outsider, the lonely, the despised, the ugly. He was the sacrifice – the ultimate sacrifice – and by His wounds this man and all of us are cleansed.

This is astonishing. In religion, the gods stay far away and we mortals work towards them, trying to be good. Jesus reverses that. Jesus comes down among us to touch the untouchables and even to become the unclean One, so that He can bless not the good, but the bad.

Let's look at the next story in chapter 2. From verse 3, four friends are desperate to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus. Verse 4: they dig a hole in the roof and lower their friend down in front of Jesus. Verse 5:

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Now we get shocked by that verse, but not for the same reason as the religious people got shocked. We're shocked because we're think Jesus has got His priorities wrong. We think, the first thing this guy needs is to walk. Jesus thinks the first thing this guy needs is forgiveness.

And that's shocking to us. Jesus thinks being forgiven is more important than your health, more important than money or getting a job or a family – all of which would have been virtually impossible for this paralysed man.

But no Jesus thinks forgiveness is the priority because if our sin remains unforgiven, it doesn't matter if we have the finest health, can outrun Usain Bolt, get the greatest job, loads of money and a great family. If we *only* go home today with a clean bill of health, we

might have a terrific life but a horrendous eternity. Jesus knows what's most important. Forgiveness is the priority.

Have you been forgiven of your sins by Jesus? Do you know the forgiveness that only God can pronounce on your life? If you don't – that's your priority. You might think other things are your priority. But no, more than anything else we need to be forgiven.

How do we get this forgiveness? We turn to Jesus, He has authority to forgive your sins.

See that is the thing that religious. Do you see in verse 6:

⁶ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷ "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

This is the really shocking thing. How can **Jesus** offer forgiveness?

Imagine if, after the service, Mathew comes up and slaps you in the face. Your issue is with Mathew. Then imagine I go up to Mathew and say 'I forgive you' – what would you say? You'd say push off Andy, you've got nothing to do with this. This is between me and the person who has wronged me.

And that is true with God. All of our sins are ultimately against God, and Jesus forgives sins. Who does he think he is? Who does Jesus think he is?

Well to prove who He is, Jesus does heal the paralytic. Verse 10, Jesus says to the religious types:

¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralytic, ¹¹ "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." ¹² He got up, took

his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

The Son of Man can forgive our sins – that is Jesus name for himself. The Son of Man. He has all the authority of God come to earth. He is ready, willing and able to forgive anyone. His forgiveness gun is on a hair trigger, and there's just one thing that sets it off. Verse 5: Faith.

That's what prompts His forgiveness in v5. Jesus sees faith and the words fly out of His mouth – Son, your sins are forgiven.

Now what does faith look like? There are a lot of wrong ideas of faith going around I think.

Some think faith is a strange mystical sensation? Or a funny feeling in the stomach? A state of consciousness which only the very spiritual can attain to?

That's not what Jesus thinks. That's not what Mark's Gospel things. What does faith look like in Mark ch2. Faith looks like - tearing a hole in a roof because you want to get to Jesus. Faith is coming to Jesus with your need. Coming to him no matter what. That is faith. When Jesus sees that, He forgives in a second.

And of course, that's the complete opposite of how the religious types respond to Jesus. The religious think that they are clean and already strong and already righteous and so they keep their distance from Jesus and remain unforgiven. But the outsiders run to Jesus and are forgiven. Which are we this morning? Are we the one who just wants to get to Jesus because we know our need. Or do we think we don't have a need and we hang back from Jesus.

Let's look at the last story of the three. From verse 13, we find Jesus teaching again and then in v14 He sees Levi sitting at the tax collectors booth.

Now when you hear the word "Tax collector", think Arms Dealer. OK, this is not a comment about the inland revenue today though it is on my mind as my tax return is due in a couple of weeks.

In the 1st century, if you were a Jewish tax collector, you were working for the Roman occupying force. And every tax collector took far too much money from your own people and gave it to the enemy – and pocketed plenty themselves. Tax collectors were despised in their day which is why in v15, "tax collectors" can be lumped in with that mass of people called "sinners." Tax collectors, sinners, the same, that lot, awful. Horrible, the baddies.

Now this tax collector called Levi was sitting there on his tax collecting booth – in the midst of his horrible job, in the midst of his guilty shame. And Jesus reaches right into that world and commands this rotten white-collar criminal "come follow me". Jesus' recruitment policy is like nothing seen on earth. Jesus actively seeks out the ungodly, the sinful, the despised and draws them in.

He *wants* to keep company with sinners.

And so v15 – to celebrate, there's a party that is every religious person's worst nightmare. Tax collectors and sinners everywhere. Unclean people contaminating everything! And Jesus is at the centre of this banquet – the life and soul of the party.

And so we return to the verse we began with verse 16:

¹⁶ When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and `sinners?'"

Jesus pipes up from the centre of the party and says some of the best words in the bible.

Verse 17:

¹⁷ "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

This explains EVERYTHING. Why do lepers *run* to Jesus? Why do the paralyzed tear a hole in a roof just to get to Him? Why are the outsiders and the unclean and the weak and the sinful attracted to Jesus? Because He's the Doctor. He is the Spiritual Doctor for sick sinners.

And Jesus says 'If you know that you are sick, you will love the Doctor and you will draw near to Him. If you don't think you're sick, you won't have any time for the Doctor and frankly the Doctor doesn't have time for you.'

> I am a guy, so I never go to the doctor. I complain about every little cough and cold, but I don't go to the doctor. When I do I like to save up all my little niggles and sicknesses so when I go I have a decent list of ailments. Why? Because no-one sits down with their doctor and says, 'I'm a picture of perfect health, I thought you should know.' They won't be impressed, you're wasting their time. I registered earlier this year. And I said, what's next do I meet the doctor and have a check up. No. Go away. Come back if you're sick! Doctors are for sick people.

And Jesus says the same things. Jesus is for sinners. Don't come to Jesus to tell him how healthy you are. You only come to Jesus when you know how sick you really are.

Written across the gateway of heaven could be the sign: 'Sinners Only! Sinners Only in heaven! The righteous need not apply.'

Isn't that exactly what Jesus is saying. I have not come to call righteous. I have come to call sinners. Written over the gates of heaven the sign: Sinners Only! The Righteous need not apply!

Or when we come to the communion rail on a Communion Sunday. Sinners only, come to eat with me, the righteous need not come to this rail. If you come up to this rail you are, in a real sense, eating with Jesus. Which must mean you are a sinner just like me. No righteous to this rail. Jesus eats with sinners, he eats only with sinners.

The terms on which we come to Jesus are only by saying 'I am like the leper – an unclean wretch'. If you come you come saying 'I am like the paralysed: powerless.' If you come you are saying 'I am like the tax collector – a sinner who should be ashamed of themselves.'

That is faith. Coming to Jesus recognizing that he - on the cross - became weak so he can strengthen us. He became the outsider so he can welcome you in. He became sin on that cross, so He can forgive you. Jesus came for the broken to make you whole. The leper was cleansed, the paralysed sinner was forgiven and the wretched outsider was welcomed as a disciple.

And all He wants from us is that we come to Him in faith. Remember what faith is? It's tearing down the roof to get to him. It's coming to Jesus in our need.

Come as the weak and sinful person that you are and receive the Doctor's care. Son, daughter, your sins are forgiven.

Pray

Our LJ we praise you you are the spiritual doctor, we come before you sick sinners who love to draw near. We come to you as the sinners we are and we ask we may receive the doctor's care. In your great name we pray.

(Credits: Glen Scrivener – Eastbourne)