

‘Rather painful insight’ Mark 1:29-39

And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them. That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed 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. And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, “Everyone is looking for you.” And he said to them, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.”

Prophet Isaiah said these words: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.” (Isa 55:8) So true, so true. Today we have this section from the gospel according Mark, which follows the one we have the last week.

Here we can see how true are these words. For our thoughts are not God’s thoughts. Unfortunately. It is difficult for us to learn to see this world and ourselves as God sees us. We fail again and again.

Besides, it may happen with the noblest intentions. We want to do our best, but what we do may not be exactly what God wants us to do. What we are going to learn today is painful in a way, for it will go against our thoughts.

So what can we find in today’s reading? Remember, before these events we read about the calling of the first disciples. Jesus called Andrew and Peter, James and John to become His disciples.

He promised to make them fishers of men. And they followed Him. Then on the Sabbath they went to the synagogue. There Jesus began to preach ‘The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Gospel!’

Then there was a man with unclean spirit and this spirit began to shout at Jesus with the result that Jesus had to rebuke Him and cast the spirit out. Sure, everyone was amazed. What is this?

This man is speaking with such an authority! Wow... Just imagine how proud were Jesus’ disciples. That was their teacher who spoke with this authority. That was His fame that spread around in surrounding regions.

Imagine yourself in their place, wouldn't you be proud? Then we get to our today's event. Jesus and His disciples went into house of Peter and Andrew.

Peter's mother-in-law was ill with a fever, and Jesus had compassion on her, took her by hand and the fever left her. Right away she felt good and begun to serve them. And then it happened.

Once Jesus had shown that He can cast out demons, that was like a signal. In the same evening at sundown people begun to bring to Him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. As Mark vividly puts it - the whole city was gathered together at the door.

We can say that this was a big day for Jesus. He got recognized. People begun to stream to Him. He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.

It is very comforting to see that true God is actually interested to solve our little problems, that He is concerned not just with big things, but that each single person, each of you is important for Him.

Obviously Jesus did this healing for quite a while and only late that night He got to rest. But then, rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

His disciples, Peter and others, were confused. Where is He, where is Jesus? Yesterday was so good a beginning, they got so many followers. They fished so many men, all of this in one evening.

Where is Jesus? People are looking for Him. What a success! Which teacher could hope to gain followers so quickly! And today, many of them are back, they are looking for Jesus. Things are going really well.

But, where is Jesus? So His disciples went searching for Him and found Him in a desolate place. Alone, praying. 'What are you doing here? Everyone is looking for you. Come, let go and keep fishing these men...'

Remember, our thoughts are not God's thoughts... For Jesus disciples everything looked so good; what a wonderful response from people. Let's use this moment, let's get even more on board with us. No? No!? Really?

What are you Jesus saying? What is wrong with you? You want to leave this place? When so many people are coming to you? Doesn't make sense. Such a good ministry... Our thoughts are not God's thoughts.

Then Jesus said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, *for that is why I came out.*"

So, what do you think about this event? What do you think about Jesus actions? What should we learn from this event? At least one thing, - our thoughts are not God's thoughts. And it may be painful.

Can we learn from this event that we need to be compassionate and help people in their needs? Jesus did it, right? Sure, Jesus had a compassion on people, and so should we as His followers.

But, do you think that helping people and being compassionate is what makes us Christians? Be careful with your answer. You know that there are many, many who are not Christians and who are compassionate and active in serving others.

The answer to this question is – no, being compassionate and caring towards your neighbours doesn't make you a Christian. We need to be clear on that. Yes, we as Christians are called to be compassionate and merciful, serving others, but this doesn't make us Christians. It simply makes us humans.

That's right, acting with compassion and love simply make us human. We all are created to live like that. Loving our neighbours as ourselves. This is how commandments are summarized. They apply to everyone. They explain what it means to be a human.

If we think that to be compassionate and loving towards others is uniquely Christian thing it only shows how corrupted the world is; when something that we are created to do, can seems so unique.

It shows that the world have accepted this idea that being selfish and self-centered is a norm, but actually caring for others is something unusual. It is not. In fact, our selfishness is unusual, it doesn't have to be this way. It is only because of our sin.

Many people are compassionate, for they enjoy it, it makes them feel good when you can help others, when thanks to you something good happens, and someone is helped.

And it gives joy because this is exactly what we are created to do, to live serving others. So, do it, care for others, love them, be compassionate, pray for the help of the Holy Spirit to do it even better, but remember, this is not what makes us Christians, this is what makes us humans.

But, even if compassion and care doesn't make us Christians, they are not optional for us either. We have to be compassionate, we have to care for others, for this is why we are created, - to love our neighbour as ourselves.

The next question. Does our caring for others and being compassionate make them Christians? Again, be careful with your answer. Does it or doesn't? If you care for someone, what happens?

People may appreciate it. They usually do. Right? These people can be more interested in you, getting attached to you, willing to spend more time with you. For you care for them.

This is where it gets tricky and where we need to learn something from today's passage. When we give people what they need, what they want, what they like, they are likely to stream to us.

We can see how this happened with Jesus. He had compassion on them, He healed them and people were streaming to Him. His disciples were so excited. Yes, our church is growing, see how many people come to us!

This is where our thoughts are so different from God's thoughts. We like to see success like apostles saw it in Jesus ministry. Results, numbers! We are excited when we can do something that draws people to us.

When there are multitudes gathering we are as excited as Jesus disciples were... see, what a wonderful event, how many people came... we are doing such a wonderful ministry!

But ... Jesus left, He went to a desolate place. Then He said: "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, *for that is why I came out.*" Yes, but so many people are coming to you?!

There is something Jesus knew clearly and we need to learn it as well. Our compassion and love to others doesn't make them Christians. Our good and loving works don't bring anyone into God's Kingdom.

It is so tempting to do something that attracts big crowds, for it gives impression that people are being reached for Christ. That makes us feel good for we can see results right away.

Ask yourself, why did Jesus leave? Why didn't He use this situation to gather even more people? The answer is very simple. He knew well why they came. They didn't come for Jesus preaching.

They didn't come to repent and to believe in the Gospel. That's why Jesus said, contrary to what seemed good for His disciples, that He is leaving to go to other towns *to preach*.

He had come to preach the Gospel, to bring people through repentance and faith from this world into God's Kingdom. This is how we can summarize it. If one is looking for God's gifts and not for God Himself, they will either get these gifts and then walk away, or won't get them and therefore walk away.

If we try to attract people with God's gifts and not with the Gospel, then it doesn't matter how big crowds we gather. They will all walk away. I'm sure you know of many examples. This is why Jesus mission was so difficult.

Yes, He could easily gather crowds. Put on a feast for 5000 and they would want to make you a king. Start healing and they would not let you leave. But He had come to proclaim the Good News.

The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Gospel. It is not about few gifts, it is about new reality. About God's eternal Kingdom. This is also why we are here. We are sent with the same message.

Of course, it is not that simple. We can't simply repeat these few words. Also Jesus used to tell them in so many ways. The hard thing is to find how to tell this message to those around us, who need to hear it. It is not easy.

If it was easy, we had done it already. It is not. Helping others, being compassionate is much easier than to find a way to proclaim the Gospel. The Gospel about God's love is not something people want to hear.

When you help someone, people look up at you; you are such a good person. When you try to share the Gospel, they look down at you like you are not exactly in your mind. It is not easy. I know it and you know it, and Jesus knows it.

But this is why we are here. Therefore we need to learn how to do it, to pray for opportunities, to share good examples, to encourage one another, to be in this mission all together – to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom with all its power.

Only when people hear that their lives earn God's anger, that they live in rebellion against their Creator, that they will be held accountable and that there is no way they can slip away.

Only when they recognize this imminent presence of God's judgment, they may be willing to hear what Jesus has to offer. Only then they may be interested in true God, in what He has to say, and not only in His gifts.

This is what we are sent to proclaim, and this is the only thing that actually makes people Christians. Christ's message of repentance and then the trust in God's promises. This is what makes someone Christian.

When we change our whole perception and begun to see ourselves as God sees us, then we begin to appreciate the unbelievable grace that God has showed to us in His Son Jesus Christ. This is why we are here – to share this message.

There is something else we need to learn from Jesus. He wasn't worried about numbers. He wasn't worried if those who came for wrong reason left. There was something that gave Him this freedom not to measure His success in numbers.

We need the same freedom. Freedom not to measure our success. As the apostle Paul put it, the only thing required is – to be faithful. Proclaim, share the Gospel as well as you can and leave the outcome in God's hands.

As we discussed the last time – Jesus message is offensive. Yes, for it imposes God's authority on us. We can't have two gods – ourselves and true God. It is either one, or another. This is why we need to proclaim the Gospel with Christ's authority.

Once we realize that we are messengers and results of our mission is up to the One, who sent us, it gives us freedom and peace. Then we can focus of the message, not on results. At the end, this is not our church, this is Christ's church.

And when we proclaim the Gospel, we need to remember – God's message is much greater than simply God's gifts for our wellbeing. It is not about God's gifts, it is about God who gives Himself to you and wants to be your God. It is not about overcoming sicknesses, it is about destroying the very root of all sicknesses, - sin and death.

It is not about casting out demons, it is about establishing the Kingdom of God, and bringing you into this Kingdom. It is not simply helping you to get what you need for this life, it is about giving you a new life, eternal life is God's presence.

It is not about fixing your problems in this world, it is about giving you a new heavens and new earth, where there is no sin, nor death, nor pain, nor grief, but joy, peace and abundance in God's presence.

This is what you are sent to proclaim. The Kingdom of God is at hand. The Kingdom which God has prepared for you, and for everyone else who wants to receive it.

Believe in the Gospel, and be ready to be overwhelmed by abundance of God's love and generosity, for God's thoughts are not our thoughts.

Amen.