

# STONE HARBOR

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## Looking Back, Looking Forward

### INTRODUCTION

Today is a special day in our church life. It marks the one year anniversary of our first worship service. A year ago we started meeting in our home on Sunday evenings. Much has happened and today we will share the time first looking at the year gone by with thankfulness; then we will see what God has for us in our ongoing study through the Book of Mark; and finally we will take a peek at the year ahead.

### Looking Back with Thankfulness

A year ago it was as if I was a baby bird receiving a nudge out of it's nest and flapping fast learning how to fly in the way down.

Over this past year I've learned many valuable life lessons including the very evident truth that serving as a pastor is an honor. I am honored to be:

- able to bring the most important words of all time to people God loves;
- able to be involved in the most significant activities of our lives (worship, service, community...);
- able to be involved in matters of the heart which matter for all eternity.
- able to walk alongside people as they struggle with life's difficulties

One year into the life of Stone Harbor Church I find myself very thankful. I am thankful for Lori standing beside me in front of the ladies of the church pressing through difficulties towards Jesus. She had to flap hard too leaving behind a thriving women's ministry she had poured herself into. I also am thankful for Dennis and Jan, Dave and Suzanne, Chuck and Kathy, Leslie, Becky, Debbie,

Marie, Alex and April, Brad and Stephanie, Russ, Debbie, Jack and Rita, Jeff and Rondel, Andy and Terrie...and the list goes on.

I'm thankful:

- That people are embracing of the Word of God,
- That people's involvement in community life and ministry teams is so high,
- That people's consistent and generous giving has allowed us to pay for all the operating expenses of the church,
- That people are willing to serve even though we do not yet have anyone on payroll,
- For the difficulties God has allowed us to endure which in turn have forced us to depend on Him and to discover again and again that He is faithful. With our losses God showed Himself faithful. We learned that God will provide. He will take the good and the bad and work it all for the good as we love and trust Him.

I find myself with much to be thankful for. Thank you God for all you are and all you have done for us. At this one year point I want to demonstrate one of the core values of the Stone Harbor – paying careful attention to God's heart as revealed in the pages of Scripture. We are going to take a small passage and continue our discovery of Who Jesus Is and Why He Matters as we study though the Gospel of Mark. Mark 3:1-6.

### **Listening to God's Heart Today**

In this passage we will encounter Jesus as the master teacher able to step into complex situations with different types of people and make all things work together to yield just what He intends.

Here we find Jesus with God's agenda, His teachable disciples, skeptical religious leaders with their own agenda, and a man with a withered hand. They are all gathered on the Sabbath in a Jewish Synagogue, a place of teaching, and the master teacher goes to work.

Let's read Mark 3:1-6.

Jesus steps into a room like this and speaks to each person right where they are; all the time advancing the agenda of God which is to establish the KOG. The withered is restored, Jesus' identity is unveiled a bit more to the teachable disciples, and the un-teachable are spurred on to their sad but necessary roles (crucifiers) in God's divine drama.

We will make a few observations about the passage and then I'll share with you a main point that is particularly on my heart.

## **A Few Observations**

Even though Jesus asked a question of the Pharisees, verse 4 records, "They kept silent" – They did not answer because answering would have implicated them of secretly plotting to do harm and to kill on the Sabbath, the exact opposite of how this day should be observed. Silence before a questioning God belays a darkened heart, yet here this evil was not hidden from Jesus who is called, the Light of the World. (Jn 8:12)

Verse 5 records how Jesus healed. "He said..." Jesus healed on the Sabbath w/o even getting up and walking over to the man, w/o even lifting a hand. This shows Jesus' power to be like the power of God in creation: "Let there be light and there was light." Jesus here in the environment of the Jewish synagogue demonstrated His power to heal by simply speaking.

Verse 5 continues, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out and his hand was restored. The teachable learn that:

- Jesus has power over physical affliction, and
- That He is a more authoritative teacher, a more accurate conveyor of God's heart than the Pharisees who they had previously regarded as the teachers of the law.

Note this man was not only physically healed, but he would also have been restored from the alienation he endured as one maimed. He, like the leper, was excluded from entering into the temple due to his condition (Lv 21:16-24). Can you imagine the joy of being no longer regarded by others as one who should be excluded? Jesus lifts up the small.

Some have pointed out that it was lawful to violate the Sabbath law in order to save life. But if a man came into an emergency room with a withered hand he would be triaged and treated only after the all the life threatening emergencies were handled. This man's healing could have waited till after the Sabbath because it was not life threatening.

So what was Jesus up to? It seems like He was putting His actions above the Sabbath law. Elsewhere He has said he did not come to do away with the law but to fulfill it, yet by healing on the Sabbath it seems like He was demonstrating that what He was up to was more important than people keeping the Sabbath.

This begs the question, what could be more important than the well established importance of the Sabbath law?

[pause]

## **The Main Point**

Look at verse 5 again. Jesus was angered and grieved at the hardness of the heart of the intentionally religious Pharisees. I'm intentionally religious in that I want to do what God has asked of me and therefore I try to read my Bible, and obey, and love the body, and come to church on Sunday... I see here the reality that Jesus can be angered and grieved at the intentional folks who miss the importance of Himself as King of the Kingdom of God. What is more important than the 10 commandments? Jesus is! No hesitation. Jesus is more important and needs absolute first priority in our lives. I don't even like the way that sounds. He is not even first among many He is, or He should be, our very lives. Paul: To live is Christ.... It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me.

We must be careful in all our good intentionality that we don't become the modern day Pharisees who go out of here and make an unholy alliance to effectively destroy Jesus and displace Him from His rightful place as King of the KOG. How could we do that? Well we do that when we elevate anything above Him.

If we are teachable what will we learn? Jesus is more important than even the Law of God. What grieved Jesus so? It was the hardness of their hearts that they could not see Him as more important. The law was a tutor to lead people to Jesus (Gal 3:24-25) and now Jesus is here! The law must serve the intention of the law maker. The law was to serve God's bigger plan of leading us to Jesus and through faith in Him into a restored right relationship with Him, with the Holy Spirit and with God the Father.

If one of my kids was having a medical emergency where their life would be saved by my violating the normally applicable speed limit laws; the law would fall and I drive faster, without any guilt. Why? The law was meant to save life, not to prevent it. The Sabbath law was only a part of God's even more important life saving plan inaugurated in the presence of Jesus as He stepped into the world and establish the KOG.

I see it as if God said to man though the law: come to Me, oh my loved children, come, all you have to do is obey my law perfectly and be righteous in all your ways. Do you see how your efforts of righteousness fail? You can't do it on your own can you? Now I come to you in Jesus Christ. Here I am. Do not now take the law and use it to separate us. I am here. I have come to you. Now that I have come in Jesus, do not fast, do not even obey My laws... My presence calls you simply to be with me.

Jesus was present. The only first thing for people to do in light of His presence was and is to be with Him. (John 1) When He chooses to send us out from His company in obedience to His law or His mission, then we go. But all of our obedience to Him must be born out of our first being with Him.

Now it is true that Jesus has left us His Holy Spirit. It is also true that at this time He has sent us out on mission to love, make disciples and be His witnesses. But the message on my heart this morning is that we must never go before we come; i.e., we must never go out and do all the commands we find in the Bible before we have first come to Jesus to embrace Him as Savior and Lord – and specifically to know Him as King of the KOG. Only then do we get up and go about doing the commands of God.

In all my calling you to read God's word daily, to practice the spiritual disciplines, to obey the commands of God in your lives... please do not hear me asking you to do this in replacement of your coming to Him and enjoying the communion, the unity, the love He has intended to share between you and He. That is first.

Your loving relationship with God is first. The rest follows.

Some of you are struggling in your relationship with your spouse. My word to you this morning is embrace the goodness of your relationship with God in Christ first. Savor His love for you, first. Delight in His company, first. Enjoy the forgiveness He has extended to you, first. Then, secure in His satisfying love for you, turn to your spouse and love him or her as Christ has loved you.

Some of you have children who are walking far from the Lord's ways. Embrace the goodness of your relationship with God in Christ first. Savor His love for your first. Delight in His company first. Enjoy the forgiveness He has extended to you first. Then, secure in His fulfilling love for you, turn to your children and love them with the love God has lavished on you.

Some of you are struggling with obeying God the law giver who is asking you to do something other than what your flesh wants to do. Embrace the goodness of your relationship with God in Christ first. Savor His love for your first. Delight in His company first. Enjoy the forgiveness He has extended to you first. Then secure in His fulfilling love for you, do what He has called you to do as an expression of your love and appreciation for Him who loves you perfectly.

**TRANSITION**

We must learn from this passage that we have it in us to anger and grieve Jesus. Let's not be counted with those who responded to Jesus with hardened hearts trying to figure out how to destroy Him so He doesn't get in the way of what we would rather have happen. Let's be the teachable ones who with tender hearts see in Jesus the One who is even greater than the Law of God, the one who broke into our world and has established the KOG.

Let us first and foremost simply be with Him! Let's know Him better, enjoy Him more, receive His love more thankfully, and know the very heart of God more certainly in the person and teachings and demonstrations of Jesus. For He has made visible the invisible and perfect heart of God.

It is my prayer for you that you relish in that this morning – that God has sent Jesus to establish a Kingdom and He has called you to be with Him there. He has called you Chuck and Kathy; Dave and Susanne, Dennis and Jan... And, I believe He would have you know that He is not through with you, but rather is actively involved in bringing about your best even through the difficulties which you can't imagine how He could redeem for the good.

He is using it all in His masterful way as only God can do, working all things together for the good... So where is He taking us?

### **Looking Forward with Trust**

First I believe God is taking us at Stone Harbor to a place where we can say, "He is good enough."

I think He is taking us to the place where we are able to say amidst even the painful losses of our lives, "It is well with my soul..."

Though I walk with physical pain, emotional loss, financial need...my relationship with God is so valuable, so solid and so sweet, that it is enough!

With Paul we can say, His grace is sufficient!

Full, satisfied and steadied in God Himself; I believe God would then have us move towards those from whom we are estranged – our separated spouses, our wayward children, our brother or sister in Christ who has offended us. And I believe God would have us bring them a gift -- the gift of God's love.

The love we bring will be wrapped in as many different wrappings as there are people and circumstances. We may need to bring tough love, or tender love, or forgiving love, or wise love... but it will all be the same love which God has first given to us, intending for us to enjoy and then pass on.

What do I see in the future for Stone Harbor? I see a place of peace in the storms of life because we are aware and trusting that God is with us and He is enough!

The rest is gravy on top:

- 24-7 building – we are trusting God for a home base that is more affordable and which we can use 7 days a week. We have a lead on another place in Ryan Ranch. You can pray for God's perfect will to be accomplished in that regard.
- Effective Youth Ministry – we need to be able to minister effectively to the youth God wants to entrust into our care. Please pray that we will develop an effective ministry to our valuable youth and that God would raise up the right people to lead this effort. Pray first, and if God would put it on your heart to be a part of that effort, come talk to me.
- More people knowing God more fully – becoming disciples of Jesus and experiencing transformation unto Christ-likeness. What is top of the list here as far as action points? Each of us being in God's word on a daily basis. Sitting at the feet of Jesus taking in everything He has to say to you. Then getting up and doing what He has asked.
- Every SH member in Christian community – enjoying the fellowship of the saints. Are you in a community group? Great, stay there. No? Get in one this week! Look at the community life handout and call the contacts for the groups and jump in.
- Every SH member in meaningful service – discovering the gifts God has given them and using them to build up the body of Christ. Are you serving the body. Thank you, we are as healthy as we are because of you. No? We need you if we are to be the church God has called us to be. How do you connect. Call me at the church office and say, "I want to be a part of a healthy Stone Harbor in its second year."

## **Conclusion**

Tired, sore, abraded, I came off my Molokai canoe trip – but I was content and it was absolutely worthwhile.

Tired, maybe sore and even abraded, I want us to come off year two of Stone Harbor – but with the deepest contentment that can only come from a rich personal relationship with God having partnered with Him in establishing more fully His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Let's pray!