



March 2-3, 2019
Pastor Megan Hackman

Sick of Religion?: Who Do You Think You Are *Mark 2:1-12*

It's been too long! I'm so glad to see you all again. I'm Pastor Megan, and I've been out for a couple weeks. A lot of significant things have happened. The moral of the stories I could share is that everything about the Kingdom of God is *real*. Like, really real. I've seen students totally emboldened and free from fear. I've seen people in Mexico changed. I've felt the power of evil in towns. I've had my voice taken away- literally- and given back. I've stood overcome on truly sacred ground. Everything we are saying about Jesus and the Kingdom is REAL.

I want that to be an even more impressive statement than I fear it's coming across. The cultural waters we swim in tend to be over-familiar with religious things—cynical when we start talking about God. Generally, our culture is tired of religion. Tired of it being political, judgmental and empty. And you know what? We have reason to think Jesus thought the same thing! We're in a series called Sick of Religion, looking at Jesus taking on religious people head on. He doesn't do that so much with debates but with demonstrations of faith that are *real* and *really matter*.

Today Jesus reveals a faith—not a religion, but a belief—deeper and with astounding authority, and that authority is proved real with an undeniable sign that truly amazes everyone. So as I read this story, I want to invite you to consider—are you desperate for all this God stuff to be *real*? I believe it is, and I pray Jesus is proved real to you today. Let me pray for us.

We are in Mark 2, beginning with verse 1:

And when [Jesus] returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk?' But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

This is the Word of God, given to us that we might know God and have abundant life.

My team in Mexico got to go every day to a center in Ensanada where a dozen women are working to overcome battles with addictions. They're not so different from us. You might recognize the "Serenity Prayer" written on their walls. They braid each others' hair, just like our girls. They liked pop music and

painting nails. They have a lot of systemic issues working against them, stuff I didn't have to grow up with. One became addicted to heroin because her mother uses right in her home. Another shared with us about being a victim of domestic violence. Another really touched my heart. Her name was Veronica, but she asked us to call her, "Shorty." She explained that she joined a gang protection at a young age. She started using drugs. Now, here she was at 42.

On our third day together, two of the girls in our group shared their testimonies of how God is working in their lives in anxiety and family brokenness, the real things of the common darkness and evil we experience as a result of that brokenness in our relationship with God, that sin. Shorty, who had been standing just outside of the circle of us, broke into the circle and in tears said, "I want to feel something! Somehow my heart got lost years ago and I haven't been able to find, it, but I'm feeling something!" I asked her if we could put our hands on her shoulders and pray for her. So our team and the girls who live in that home got around her and prayed for her. We prayed God would go all the way to the deepest part of her heart and fill her up again with love and with the Holy Spirit. Then Shorty cried out something none of us will forget – "¡Ayúdame!" Help me!

I asked Shorty if she wanted to receive Jesus, if she wanted his Spirit to come and live in her, and she said yes. So right there, in her own words, she asked Jesus to fill her. She experienced the opposite of sin—the drawing near of God who loves her. Shorty's now in right relationship with God, and we know all of heaven is celebrating this sister and daughter coming back.

Before this moment in the story of Mark, we could not have had a story like Shorty's. People understood the severity of sin, the severity of being separated from God, but if someone wanted to make things right with God, it would have required animal sacrifice not just once but many times. Shorty would have had to go to Jerusalem to be near God's presence. The Spirit of God was unable to dwell in her, unable to get holy enough to be with God. But now, Jesus was offering something crazy new: forgiveness. Not through sacrifice. Not through a life of perfection. Not through religion. Through mere words that he spoke.

Let's go back to the story and see Jesus offering to us this radical and real solution to sin.

Mark 2:1 says Jesus had gone back to Capernaum, and likely back into Peter's house. He's back in the crowds where people expect him to heal. Verse 2 says Jesus was preaching the Word to the them—that is, Jesus was telling the crowds that the way to be a part of the Kingdom of God is to repent, to turn and live in a new way and to believe in God. So he's teaching this and then we get to see first-hand what this new Kingdom looks like.

Four friends have a friend they want to see healed. So they carry their friend on his mat all the way to Peter's house. But there's too many people to get to Jesus. So verse 4 says they pull up the thatch and the tiles on the roof to lower him in through the beams right to the feet of Jesus. Jesus sees *their* faith, the faith of the friends, the faith that believes that their friend can be healed, that they can draw near to God, and as a result of seeing *that* faith, Jesus says to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven."

There are two things that are real in this man's condition. One is that he's paralyzed. We can see that. He's lying on a mat. He had to be carried in. That's obvious to us and to everyone else. But to Jesus, there's something even more real that's *truly* paralyzing. It's that he is experiencing sin—separation from God.

Jesus addresses first what the friends can't see. He says, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Do we believe the miracle of that moment? Because I think if I had been the friends, I would have been disappointed. My friend is still on the mat. I can't see any change that forgiveness has brought. That doesn't seem as real to me.

When we walked into the rehab center, it'd be simple to see the teeth that are missing from meth, the eyes that are cast down in shame and think *that's* the real thing. So we bring in music and nail polish and hope, mercifully!, to get them to experience joy on the surface. But the more REAL thing is that some of those women didn't know they could have a relationship with God who loves them! So we brought to them our stories of meeting God, too, in the hidden places. Shorty got that need. She knew her heart was lost. Jesus offers, radically, a new way back to God. At his word the paralytic, Shorty, you, me, are offered a way to God, a way to find our hearts and be filled again; that way is forgiveness.

The religious people of that day were furious! Only God could give holiness. Or, more cynically, only their system of religion, what paid their bills, offered forgiveness. Jesus sees what they're thinking and says to them basically, "Oh, you think it's easier to just *say* that your sins are forgiven? Nothing's really happening? No! That's going to be incredibly hard." To make right people's deep condition of how they're experiencing brokenness with God and with his world, Jesus is going to have to die. He will be the once and for all sacrifice, holy and perfect, that takes on the sin of the world and destroys it. Then Jesus will rise from dead, and his resurrection will display for us that the new life he's offering now to this paralytic really is real.

So Jesus says, "Okay, so that you know that I can do *that*, verse 10, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins... I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home."

The outer healing shows that God really has come! His forgiveness is real! And so that you might know that—look at this paralyzed man! Look at Shorty! Look at me! The forgiveness of Jesus is real, and the way to be free from the evil of this world, of brokenness, is to tell Jesus, "¡Ayúdame!" Help me! And invite him into your life.

Some of you need to do that for the first time. You are the paralytic. You are the one who has not understood that the root of anxiety, family brokenness, that root is sin, and forgiveness is the healing balm you need. Cry out, Help me!, and let God draw near. Some of you might need to be the four friends. You can see the outward signs of sin deeply at root in the lives of your friends and family. Take them your stories of Jesus setting you free.

Today I'm resonating with the homeowner. It's likely Peter. He would have been standing there in the living room as he heard these friends digging up his roof. Feeling the dust falling on his head as suddenly he sees sunlight. Watching as the paralyzed friend lowered right at the feet of Jesus. Hearing, "Your sins are forgiven." Being knocked over by the man now running home. When all that was said and done, do you think Peter looked up and said, "Who's going to fix my roof?" NO! We know Peter told Mark these stories. He *was* the one who told us his house got torn up. But what he remembered, what he passed down to us, was verse 12, was that all the people were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this."

I feel like Peter today. My life, the life of the Hackman family is in a season of disruption. The roof is being pulled off. And I am witnessing God doing amazing things. I'm a living witness of the freedom I, myself, experienced just weeks ago when I cried out, "Help me!" And I'm also witnessing God doing incredible things in our neighbors to the North in Port Orchard.

Nearly a year ago now, Pastor Mark asked me if I would go into Port Orchard. and see if I could discover why it was that 131 families were commuting for worship services in Gig Harbor. So I went with a friend for a couple days to pray and to ask the Holy Spirit, Is there spiritual hunger in Port Orchard? Are there people with a "kingdom imagination"? That is, are there people, even perhaps some who don't know Jesus, who understand that this life isn't all there is? People who are seeking and working toward something *more* real. And we were blown away. It's not that people were looking for religion, for another weekend service, but they're looking for wholeness, restoration, looking for God.

So here's the big news: I'm going to be leading a church-plant in Port Orchard, Chapel Hill Port Orchard. We feel it's time to release me to lead a community of people who will introduce and re-introduce not religion but *faith* and forgiveness to a population of people I've heard crying out, *Ayudame*, help me. Believe me, it'd be easier and more convenient to stay here, but I've seen the people on metaphorical stretchers in Port Orchard, and I must go.

One of my very first conversations in Port Orchard has become a blooming friendship with a woman who has an infertility journey like mine who sat across from a table and asked me, "How I can reconnect with God? It's been too long. I don't know how." My second day in Port Orchard I brought donuts into Steve Maxwell's bank and the first employee there, within 5 minutes, was asking my friend Becky and I to pray that she would be free from anxiety.

Everything that we've been talking about at Chapel Hill with going Beyond These Walls, we feel God is calling us to do in Port Orchard. Release leaders—releasing me, particularly, and possibly you!—Multiply disciples, expanding our LifeGroups, beginning a worship service in 2020-- and Love our neighbor—partnering with Coffee Oasis, starting Alpha, and more.

We, the Hackman family, aren't the only ones having our lives disrupted so people can meet Jesus. There are a host of others making space for God to come and bring his very real Kingdom into the heart of Port Orchard, and I want you to hear from them. [Video]

[Megan finishes. Maybe this is where Mark comes up and joins me?]

This Kingdom stuff is real, and God is making it real in Mexico, in Gig Harbor and in Port Orchard. We must go! The forgiveness of Jesus is just too good, and the witness of Jesus in Port Orchard needs bolstering. Go ahead, tear off the roof of my house! Let's get the hurting to the feet of Jesus. We are getting to have a front-row seat to the amazing power of God. "We have never seen anything like this!" May that be our story for years to come.

[Mark]

Beyond These Walls was always more than just a catchy name for our initiative to eliminate our building debt. It embodies our desire to faithfully live out God's call to make disciples, send leaders, and love our neighbors like never before. We are more than halfway to our goal thanks to many of you.

That's why this day is one of the most exciting expressions of that desire... we are being called, as a congregation, to plant a church beyond these walls in the midst of our larger community in the South Sound and South Kitsap Peninsula. That's not something we believe God has called Pastor Megan to do alone. So we want to give you some space in this time of offering to consider how God might be calling you to join us.

In your worship guide you'll find a card like this (HOLD UP CARD). This is a prayer and pledge card for our Port Orchard church planting initiative. Please fill this out and put it in the plate today, even if you are already putting your regular tithe or offering.

You can sign up to get emails from Pastor Megan...or you can register to come to the monthly Church Planting 101 class...And since we printed these cards before the Snowmagedon last month, please note that the Port Orchard town hall is tomorrow (today) and the Gig Harbor town hall is on Thursday. Please let us know if you wish to come to either of those.

People often expect us to ask for money to plant a church. Well, we're doing that a bit differently. Because of the success of our Beyond These Walls initiative to retire our building debt, we've been able to begin making the investment in church-planting in Port Orchard. Pastor Megan is raising additional support from our Presbytery. So if you want to give to church-planting, the best thing you can do is to join us and pledge to help us come over the finish line of the Beyond These Walls initiative. When this initiative is over, we will be putting even more funding toward church-planting. If you'd like to make a pledge over the next 18 months, you can indicate that on your card. You can also give to Beyond These Walls by visiting our website at chapelhillpc.org, forward-slash "beyondthesewalls."

[Megan]

We pray some of you will respond today like me, I am the homeowner, I'll make room! God can disrupt my life, wherever I am, for people to get close to him. No matter where you live, come hear more and check out that Church Planting 101 class. I pray many of you will say, I am the friends! I'll carry you. And take close, prayerful care to bring your friends to Jesus. And we don't want to miss that there are some of you today who would say, I am the paralytic. Help me! Today is your day, this is your moment, offer Jesus your life and let him fill you.

Let this time of offering be a surrender of your life, your belief, your finances, to the very real Kingdom of God.

So there are a couple of things you can put in the offering plate as it is passed. You can, as usual, put in your cash or check donation in the offering plate. You can also give online at our website. Or you can text to give. Place this insert in the plate as well.

[Mark]

If you are visiting us as a guest for the very first time, we are so glad you are here and we aren't asking or expecting you to give. Just put the grey welcome card in the plate as it is passed and let us know you were here, and if we can help you get connected.

However God is speaking to your heart today, I pray that you'll listen carefully and respond in faith. We'll give you a few minutes to fill out your cards and then the ushers will come by with the offering plates.