

There was once a man named Frank who was reciting a litany of woes to his priest... Well Father, the man said. "It's been a terrible year... The factory that I work in closed six months ago and I still can't seem to find a job..." "Well," said the priest, "It could be worse." Oh, but Father, that's not all! Said Frank... "Because I haven't been able to find work, we had to move in with my wife's parents! And My mother-in-law hates me!" "Well," said the priest, "It could be worse." "Father," the man shouted... my life is a wreck, I've been taking it out on everyone around me and since I've been such a miserable person, now my children won't even talk to me... How can it be any worse???" The priest paused and said, "Well... it could have happened to me..."

The theologian Richard Rohr once said that you can tell a lot about a person from what they do with their pain... Do they transmit it? That is to say, do they inflict their pain upon others??? Or, do they transform it? Do they work toward healing and eventually, see those painful experiences as a way that they can walk with and be a healing presence to others.

I know that I have walked through difficult times, and I am sure you have as well... Some of us here today are even now walking through with Jesus through the valley of the

shadow of death... But we know that we are not to fear... We know that Jesus will heal the wounds that this world inflicts upon us... But sometimes it's tough... We have all just experienced a year and a half of collective trauma caused by this pandemic... Sometimes we do well and we recognize how our pain affects our view of the world around us... and when we have that awareness, we are able to extend grace to both ourselves and others... And other times... Other times, we don't do quite as well, and we act out... And when we act out, we often say things we don't really mean... And we can even manage to hurt both ourselves, and the people who we love...

Now, with all of this in mind... If we look at our gospel lesson today, we would do well to get some context... Mark reminds us that the disciples had just returned from being sent out two by two to minister in the world... Just after Jesus sends out the twelve, Mark updates us on the beheading of John the Baptist... And this brings us to our gospel lesson today... Jesus was of course extremely close to John... And so, I think it not surprising that he tells the twelve that they should all withdraw to a deserted place. And the reason... The reason Jesus wanted to get away from the crowds that day was that he was grieving... Jesus and the

twelve were all grieving the death of John the Baptist... I imagine tears streaming down their eyes and Jesus and his disciples get into their boat in the hopes of just being able to grieve in peace... This picture of Jesus informs our gospel reading in such a way that we can see a glimpse of a tender-hearted Jesus retreating from the crowds so that he can escape the hardness of the world... I imagine his grief must have been terrible. I imagine he didn't feel like he could do one more thing... I imagine that all he wanted in that moment was to be alone.

But, we find that when Jesus gets to his destination, the crowds have followed him. And what's more... They must have heard he was coming... Because even more people began to show up... And they brought those who needed healing with them... I am sure that in light of John's death some in the crowd were looking for direction and leadership from Jesus. Perhaps some of John's disciples were even among the crowd. I imagine it must have been extremely difficult for Jesus as his fame was building... I imagine that it can be overwhelming when thousands of people are always wanting something from you... I wonder if we were in a similar situation... What would we do??? Would we

transform our pain and use it to lovingly serve others... Or would we transmit our pain... Would we lash out...

So, most of you know by now that I am fascinated by what might have been Mark's intentions for including certain stories, or certain events or characters. Mark has even been known to drop some clues for us in the way of a word or repeated character or story and if we look through our lesson today, we will find that Mark mentions that people believed that if they were to touch the hem of Jesus' garment, they could be healed... This should of course sound familiar. In the previous chapter, Mark tells us the story of the woman who pushed through the crowds, touched the hem of Jesus' clothing, and was healed.

There is certainly a lot going on in our gospel lesson today... And I think in the midst of our wondering, it's worth saying that I believe Mark is painting a picture of a Jesus who even in the midst of his grief, is willing to reach out in love and offer healing and hope to all those around him... I believe that Mark is painting a picture of a savior who transforms his pain and uses it to love and serve others... A foreshadowing of the cross if ever there was one...

This is picture of an increasingly famous Jesus who needed who was finding it more and more difficult to find a

place where he could be alone. That, to be alone, Jesus had to send his disciples off by themselves, or go mountain climbing, or as Mark will soon tell us, go walking out on the water where no one could follow him... I wonder what this kind of fame might do to a person. And I wonder if Mark was subtly telling us that even though Jesus, in the midst of his sorrow for his cousin John, even though he was finding it more and more difficult to find some quiet time for himself... This Jesus was able to have compassion and love and heal those who followed him... Jesus didn't lose himself to anger... or bitterness... Jesus didn't get jaded... Because Jesus knew, he was being our example of how to live, Jesus knew that he was being our great example of how we are to serve others and love one another...

So, I think perhaps that Mark's message for us today is that even in the midst of suffering, we are called to do all that we can to be like Jesus and love others... That somehow, healing lies within our ability to love others... That, we are to live in humility, and with love, generosity, and respect for others. And we do so because we live by, exactly what we have been saved by – the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Amen.