

Sermon: "You've Got Locusts in Your Teeth" Traci Hubbard

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Mark 1:1-8

Since I lost my first baby tooth I have always wanted white teeth. The Joel Olsteen kind of white that makes people stop in their tracks and think, "Wow! Great smile!" But it wasn't in the cards I was dealt. What was and is in my cards is tetracycline stains that Insurance will not cover in porcelain because it is considered cosmetic. I am sensitive when it comes to my teeth. Last Friday I had the privilege of being a guest on the legendary fishing boat of Deryk Dorwood our Sacred Space Chair. We spent six adventurous hours together casting our hearts into the Bow River I must have asked Deryk a hundred questions during the day and you know what? He never answered me with an , "I don't know." He had an answer for everything. Marie you know that better than anyone right? As we drove to the Bow River I asked if a field was barley or wheat. Deryk pulled the truck over, got out, took a knife out of his pocket and cut off the top of a plant. Then he proceeded to walk across the highway and cut another plant. He said this is barley and this is canola...see the seed in the pod? This is what I was talking about earlier. The seed is protected by the pod so when China says we are hurting canola by spraying the plants they don't know what they are talking about.

Deryk and I brought our lunches, sandwiches and fruit. I ate my last peach around 3 pm. He drives his boat like a 15 year old boy on steroids and one time we hydroplaned onto a boulder. My phone was turned off so our location was unbeknownst to anyone. I thought this is not the way I want to die. Little did I know that a tenth foot rainbow trout would also try to take me out. After we put up the boat we went to eat dinner. We talked about everything and Deryk treated me with gentle respect. We laughed and laughed. He dropped me off around 9 pm and that's when I saw it. I had pieces of peach caught in my teeth and Deryk never said a word. The man who knows everything about everything either didn't observe I had food in my teeth or he didn't have the courage to tell me. Looking in the mirror I felt uncomfortable as there is never a right time to discover you have had food in your teeth for the last six hours.

Beginnings can be abrupt. When a movement or change happens we search for the reason or cause, when most of the time a movement is a product of a confluence of reasons and causes. Endings are also similar. Mark frames his narrative with Jesus barging in and leaving like a shooting star. Other Gospel writers included birth narratives and side stories to soften the suddenness of Jesus' Movement.

Mark wrote his Gospel during a time of acute persecution which is one of the reasons he cuts straight to the point by discussing Jesus' identity, the role of suffering, and the necessity of faith. Mark was mentored by Peter, which is obvious from Peter's perspective in his pen. He paints Jesus as a Servant-Leader and a compassionate model to imitate. Mark's fast-paced narrative describes a suffering Servant who was engrossed in constant ministry that consisted of healing, teaching, feeding, encouraging and restoring the broken. Mark's focus comes from his own need of encouragement and restoration. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey across Asia Minor but during their journey Mark became frightened and left the team with his tail between his legs. Time went by and Mark grew up and asked if he could give missionary work another try. Paul thought he was immature and a coward but Barnabas took Mark under his wing and mentored him into an emerging leader. We know this because Paul sends for him in II Timothy 4:11 saying, "He is useful to me for ministry". Mark became a responsible leader and views Jesus as the Ultimate Leader. His focus is not on Jesus as the Messiah but as a model for all of us. His Gospel focuses on Jesus considering relationships to be paramount as Jesus embodies the laws of empowerment, sacrifice, connection, priorities, timing and legacy. An interesting note that we do not want to miss is that effective leadership does

not necessarily require credentials and leaders who bring necessary change always transform the traditional paradigm. And the best leaders, the healthy leaders, always begin as servant leaders.

Verse 1 in Mark is a siren blast. Thirty year old Jesus bursts into the desert. Theologian John Cobb writes that God is not only the source of order, but also the “basic source of unrest in the universe” (Process Theology, 59). God creates the system and God shakes it up from time to time to give it new direction and new life. Mark shouts, “Hey everyone listen up! Good news is bursting into our lives!” Rarely does any new movement or change feel like it has arrived at the right or best time. The Civil Rights and LGBTQ movements were and continue to be uncomfortable even while we sympathize and walk in parades. But as Martin Luther King responded to some who said the movement was just but the timing was off, he said, “not now usually means never”. Movements, life giving change, seldom come at the best time and they always arrive without a fixed outcome. Biblical scholar Adela Yarbro Collins writes, “The narrative as a whole is open-ended, and important predictions and promises remain unfulfilled when the account ends”.

Mark doesn't begin his letter saying, “Jesus is the good news”, rather, his purpose is to share the good news about the ministry of Jesus. Mark grounds the movement of Christ as a

prophetic history of God's work through creation. He quotes Isaiah and Malachi to remind us that movements are results of prior events that we may not effect change in us until they burst into our lives.

John the Baptist is the forerunner for the ministry of Jesus. In human terms, the scene is one of scarcity as John is not standing in a comfortable podium in the city but in the sand and waters of the River Jordan. He has one purpose as we see the text say, "He came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

John does not preach that one must be covered in the blood of Jesus for the remission of sins, to be forgiven. What we see is that people journeyed to the Jordan River from Judea and Jerusalem to become authentic and transparent people. They confessed their human failings and regrets to one another and forged a new community in the wilderness. Civilization had to go into the desert, into the fringes of wildness, beyond man-made structures and tameness to heal and become a thriving community of faith. Friends, when God speaks, more often than not, the Leader will have obvious differences from their audience, locusts in their teeth, honey in their hair and outfits that do not resemble a stole or collar. When God speaks, it is often outside the noble ideas and confines of a stained-glass organization or network.

John was not your average forerunner into something new that promised a better way of being and living. He was a simple man, a humble and passionate man, that wanted others to meet and appreciate the awesome power and love that only Jesus could provide. And the way Jesus was going to provide God's power and love was through being a Servant Leader.

Friends, the love of God has abruptly burst into our congregation. For whatever reason, God has placed me here in this uncomfortable time to lead us into a healing and empowering transformation. A Holy Shift is coming and like the seemingly crazy John the Baptist, I have been called to you to prepare a way for this shift and I am looking for leaders to help me get our plane off the ground. I am looking for people who are able to understand the instructions concerning the exit door. I am looking for people who are able to open the door. And I am looking for people who are verbally able to guide others through the door. I see what needs to happen and I believe I know what we need to do to get off the ground and fly. I want to take you with me into the winds of the Holy Spirit that are found in the unconventional, but loving ways of Jesus Christ. I know that taking off can be unsettling. We cannot 100 percent predict the weather or see everything that lies ahead. But when we model the ways of Christ, when we are not afraid to be share our stories with others, when we intentionally journey out into the lives of others, feed them, listen to them,

and invite them in to connect, grow and serve with us, we will be under the wing of God, flying in the winds of the Spirit, the winds of healing change and we will be joyful. I trust that God is currently removing obstacles out of our midst for our journey together. I may have locusts in my teeth and you may too, but who cares as long as we acknowledge our humanity and have dental floss we're ready to be blown away. We have no need to worry because we know the pilot by heart. May we dare to love and live greatly. Amen.