Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowds” (Mark 3:10).

Heb 7:25–8:6; Mark 3:7-12

After watching yesterday’s Inauguration, we can better understand Mark’s description of Jesus’ concern for his personal safety. The disciples served as his security detail, like secret service agents surrounding the new president or the people protecting Pope Francis. Today’s Gospel is one of several accounts in which Jesus is pressed in by the crowds trying to touch him or grab hold of his clothing. He uses a boat to teach from but also to keep from being trampled. As word spreads of his miracles, people stream in from Galilee and Judea and the bordering regions around the Sea of Galilee.

If this is Act One of Jesus’ ministry, it is marked by enthusiasm and triumph. Jesus is attracting large crowds along with the attention of temple officials, Herod and Pilate, all trying to assess his impact in a setting where control was paramount and popularity spelled trouble for the puppet kingdom and the Roman occupation, whose spies were everywhere. Jesus himself is concerned because his real mission is being misunderstood. He has not come to be a miracle worker or a messianic superstar, but to announce a time of repentance and God’s outpouring of grace. He is “succeeding,” but not in the way he knows will fulfill his mission.

Act Two will be a slow descent into controversy and opposition. By the middle of Mark's Gospel, Jesus is already telling his disciples that he is going to be rejected and killed in Jerusalem. His healings and exorcisms continue, but he orders people not to broadcast the miracles, and often he has to withdraw into the wilderness or move about secretly to avoid the crowds and his relentless critics. After a final triumphal arrival in Jerusalem and confrontation in the temple, Jesus is already preparing himself for arrest and death, knowing this is how he will fulfill his true purpose as God's Suffering Servant.

St. Paul and all four Gospel after the fact will discern the pattern of Jesus' glory through defeat, what Mark calls the "Messianic Secret" and Paul names the "Paschal Mystery," Jesus as the Passover Lamb whose death initiates the Exodus to freedom and new life. Every disciple accepts this same pattern by dying to self with Christ in order to share his resurrection.

The hope for national recovery now focuses on our new leaders, but this should not excuse anyone from taking up their own responsibility to be the change they want in others, to demonstrate the discipline and self-emptying love that alone can heal a divided nation. Jesus fulfilled the Law and Prophets by his suffering. We will share in his redemptive work only by sharing in the power of his Paschal Mystery. This is the engine of history and the path to the Beloved Community he died and rose to proclaim.

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