

# Making Space for God

## Lessons from Mark #4—The Pharisees—Boo, Hiss

### Opening Prayer

Gracious God, our sins are too heavy to carry, too real to hide, and too deep to undo. Forgive what our lips tremble to name, what are hearts can no longer bear, and what has become for us a consuming fire of judgment. Set us free from a past that we cannot change; open to us a future in which we can be changed; and grant us grace to grow more and more in your likeness and image; through Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Amen



Prayer used at Pasadena Covenant Church on 2/11/07

### Arrival

Take some time to settle yourself by breathing deeply. Once you feel relaxed invite the Lord to guide and direct your thoughts for the day. Review your calendar or read your journal to think back over where you have been in the last four weeks. What burdens, emotions, and concerns do you carry? What are you thankful for? Offer these to the Lord.

### Scripture—Mark 3:1-6

Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. <sup>2</sup>Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. <sup>3</sup>Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.” <sup>4</sup>Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent. <sup>5</sup>He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. <sup>6</sup>Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

### Reflection

In the gospel they play the role of the villain Snidely Whiplash. Whenever they step on stage, the audience boos. Jesus called them blind guides, whitewashed tombs, and hard-hearted hypocrites. They were the guys in the black hats easy to dismiss, easy to hate. Yet for those of us who take our religion seriously, they are the group who may have the most to teach us.

In Hebrew culture, the Pharisees were the model citizens fervently loyal to God, zealous for knowledge of Scripture, and respected within the community. Like Jesus, they wanted to see the coming of God’s kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. But somewhere along the way, their fervent zeal became twisted by fear. Their vision of God as sovereign, mysterious, and free blurred to the point where their God became predictable and understandable. Their religious practices, which should have kept them humble and open to mystery, wonder, and awe, made them proud and closed minded.

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For those of us who take our religion seriously, the disease of Pharisee-ism is a constant threat to our spiritual health. The disease of Pharisee-ism makes us think that by understanding a body of knowledge or following a set of practices, we are made well. But knowledge and practices alone do not heal us; Jesus does. And according to Jesus, in this life we are never fully well. We need a Savior daily. We need His mercy daily. We are always lost looking for home; always hungry wanting more bread of life; always restless longing for consummation. Yes, the presence of Jesus will comfort us, give us joy, and make us thankful, but it will also remind us that we live in a season of waiting like a bride waiting in hope for her wedding day.

Like the Pharisees, those of us who take our religion seriously, choose a hard path. People of faith must endure a certain level of internal tension that is the result of living with self doubt and uncertainty. We must admit that we are partly blind and we serve a God who is grand beyond full comprehension. But our path is made easier by Jesus who has compassion for us as he did for the Pharisees. Though he was angered by their myopia, he also felt deep sadness for them. (vs. 5)<sup>2</sup>

## Readings

Progress in the spiritual life commences when a person abandons a life build on mindless extroversion or on blind obedience to instincts and unconscious mind-sets. Instead the seeker after God begins to take notice of the promptings of conscience and the first stirrings of spiritual desire...A certain amount of drama is necessary to help us make the transition from a comfortable, easygoing, and relatively mindless existence to a careful, industrious, zealous, and even fervent life.

*Michael Casey in Living in the Truth, page 71*

It would be a wonderful world if younger people had all the qualities that come with sustained effort and experience, but it is delusional to believe that it could ever happen. In all probability, they will never arrive at such mellowness if we do not encourage them first of all to act their age and exhibit the qualities of youth: brashness, assertiveness, initiative, color, verve, and panache. And let them make mistakes; there is no better school of maturity. If we want to harness the energy of pre-geriatrics, then we must be prepared to put up with a little abrasiveness. There is no point in trying to fight against the slowness of authentic growth. Most people will soften over the next forty years. Saint Benedict reminds us to not to be so zealous in scraping off the rust that we end up ruining what is underneath.

*Michael Casey in Living in the Truth, page 177*

People who merely believe and don't think, forget that they continually expose themselves to their own worst enemy: doubt. .Whenever belief reigns, doubt lurks in the background. But thinking people welcome doubt: it serves them as a valuable stepping-stone to better knowledge.

*James Hollis in Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life, Page 219*

## Benediction

As you go on your way, may Jesus go with you: Before you to show you the way, behind you to encourage you, above you to watch over you, below you to uphold you, within in you to give you his peace, and beside you to be your Friend. In the faithful love of the Father, the amazing grace of the Son and the guiding power of the Spirit. Yes! Yes! Yes! Amen

<sup>2</sup> Reflection by Steven Stuckey

<sup>3</sup> Artwork—Boxes, Digitally Enhanced marking pen drawing on paper, 9 x 12 inches, by Sadie Isch, age 7, 2017