

The Park Road Pulpit

Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church

Russ and Amy Jacks Dean, Pastors

What Happens in the Galilee Does NOT Stay in the Galilee

Mark 6.30-51

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Amy Jacks Dean



Las Vegas marketing gurus have struck gold with their ad: What happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas. The commercials are clever and funny. They have created a slogan that is now used for many more places than Las Vegas, yet every time it is said, your mind instantly connects with Vegas. The idea is creative and seductive. It is also pretty pitiful. It's a free license to leave your supposed hum-drum life to fly away to this oasis in the desert to live a rowdy and raucous getaway experience complete with plenty of gambling and partying that seems endless – until you board the plane back home to your sad and boring existence in the “real” world. And even though we all know that almost always your sins will find you out, “what happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas” is an alluring proposition for those who are desperate for escape or who yearn for some excitement. My apologies to all you Vegas lovers out there. I'll not call names! I've driven through it once, and that was enough for me. About all the use I have for Las Vegas is that it is the most convenient airport to access some of God's most beautiful creations.

There were certainly times when Jesus could have used this slogan himself on all those occasions when he said – *tell no one about this*. He wasn't looking to be just another one of many, many faith healers that came through town. And surely he knew that if word got out about him concerning who he really was – his work would be done. So often when he was a part of something really amazing – the very kind of thing that

would be worth telling – that’s when he would say *tell no one about this – what happened here stays here*. But the people couldn’t help themselves. They had to tell his story. And as his story got told and passed down, it eventually got written down – for the Jesus story was simply too good to be true and it could not help but be told. And so we still tell it today. I tell it today because I believe that it does make a difference.

I know you must be tired of hearing this, but when I close my eyes I can see the land and the water and the hills and the towns where this story is told. Everything is so much closer than you would think. From any one point you can see the other side of the lake. Small towns and villages line the banks. Tiberius stands alone as a larger city. The strip that outlines the lake is green and fruitful with banana trees and olive trees and date trees. And all along the Sea of Galilee, just beyond the strip of green and signs of life, are brown and barren hills of deserted places. This space holds a beauty all its own, but the hub of life is close to the water. I can picture it: the disciples are excited to give a report to Jesus of all that has happened to them and through them. “Mark refers to the disciples as ‘apostles’ here for the only time . . . The term apostle, a technical term of the early Christian missionaries, indicates that they are official agents. Returning to report to the one who sent them is a function of official emissaries.” (page 600) And so Jesus pulls them away for some time alone. Quiet reflection and debriefing. A getaway. A mini-retreat. The text says *come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while*. Doesn’t that sound great? Aren’t there days when you would give just about anything for someone to say that to you? If we are to be disciples of Jesus, we have to spend some time away from the hustle and bustle. But as this story reminds us, getting away is never easy to do. The phone always rings. The Blackberry always signals. Verizon always has

its army in place so that “can you hear me now?” is practically antiquated. It seems that it was no different back then. Even without modern technology, Jesus couldn’t really get away. The crowds followed them – apparently in such a hurry that they didn’t even gather up any provisions. Did they think they could literally live off of every word that came out of Jesus’ mouth? And this sets the stage for Mark’s telling of the feeding of the 5000 (men, that is). Which probably means the gathering was at least twice as many as was estimated. And the story is told that when they got organized and gathered up what food they could find and divided up in groups – there was enough. Same is true today. If we would organize and gather up what food we find here, there would be enough. And just like in the story, there would really be more than enough. I’m guessing – there would always be 12 basketfuls left over.

And after that Jesus sent them all on their merry way, he pulled away for some time alone for himself. He was spent. Tired. Depleted. He needed to get away and refuel. But it seems that just about the time he settles in, a storm begins to brew on the water, and he realized that his work is never done. This time instead of teaching and feeding, he is needed to calm the fears of those very disciples – apostles as Mark has called them now. And the story is told that he walked across that water to them – intending to just pass them by – but when they saw him they thought he is a ghost - for in such a short period of time they forgot who he was. They didn’t even recognize him. It’s easy to do. We get so caught up in our own lives that we forget that we are not alone. And then we become afraid. And it is then that Jesus says to them – and to us – *it’s me, don’t be afraid*. So often that is the message of Scripture: *Fear not/Don’t be afraid*. And the text says *that he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased*.

Today we look at Jesus as a disciple himself. As defined by The American Heritage College Dictionary, a disciple is “one who assists in spreading the teachings of another.” That was Jesus’ job – his mission – to spread the teachings of God. And this one little section of the sacred story gives us a pretty good job description of the life of a disciple. The need to get away and refuel yourself first - for we can only give out of our overflow. If we are empty we have nothing to give. But those times of renewal seem pretty scarce and often too brief when they do come – for the need “out there” is always too great. There’s teaching that needs to be done and the hungry that need to be fed and fears that need to be calmed. And if we claim this text at all and decide to live our lives as disciples then our own marketing campaign has to be What Happens in the Galilee Does NOT Stay in the Galilee! We’ve got to reproduce this story – we as a church have to replicate this story. And we, as individuals, have to imitate this story.

This is what struck me about this series of stories: I recognized our own lives in it. That constant feeling of being pulled. Trying to get away and take some rest just to be pulled back in to all that is going on in the world around us. And just about the time you get one thing settled and you try for that getaway again, another storm begins to brew that needs your attention. And so you spend your life feeling never fully rested and yet never tending to everything that needs tending. I think that the lesson from Scripture is that the life of a disciple always lives within that tension. It’s just that it didn’t seem to bother Jesus as much as it bothers us.

We like neat and tidy or order. We want our time away to be uninterrupted, and we carry resentment if it is. We want our work – our mission and ministry – planned to fit into our schedule, and when it doesn’t – we become frustrated. How can we learn to live

life pulled from worship to service? And worship to service. And worship to service. Never getting enough of either and sometimes too much of one.

The last line from our text today says of the disciples: *and they were utterly astounded*. The life of discipleship is not easy. It is a life of introspection and looking beyond self. It is a life of praise and thanksgiving and tending to the needs of others. It is a life that requires one to *rest a while* and be ready at a minute's notice to jump into action. It is a life of prayer and a life of service. It is a life of quiet and a life of teaching. It is a life of renewal and a life of sacrifice. It is a life feeding your own soul and feeding hungry bellies. It is a life of respite and a life of ministry. It is a life of listening for the still small voice of God and a life of speaking the truth: *do not be afraid*.

So how's the balance of this life of discipleship working out for you? Are you becoming a Disciple Through Worship and Service? Or are you out of sync? I've been to Las Vegas once. I'm fine with what happens there staying there. Our world can't take any more of that kind of place. But our world can't afford for What Happens in the Galilee to Stay in the Galilee? May it be so.