

I want to start with a question this morning? What is your opinion of large crowds? Are you drawn to events that draw large crowds? Or do you tend to shy away from crowds? The largest crowd ever recorded gathers every 12 years on the Ganges River. Up to eight million Hindus gather to bathe in the river, hoping that their sins will be forgiven. The largest outdoor concert ever was in Rio De Janeiro, where in 1994, 4.2 million people watched Rod Stewart belt out his hits. And did you know that over three million Boston Red Sox fans gathered in 2004 to celebrate the Sox winning the World Series and the end of the Curse of the Bambino.

Outside of sporting events in my life, the most memorable large crowd for me was back in 1991 when I gathered with about 50,000 other men in Boulder, CO, to participate in the very first Promise Keeper stadium event. Fifty thousand men singing in unison How Great Thou Art was something to experience.

As we have seen so far in Mark, Jesus draws a crowd. Jesus has fans. The word "crowd" appears 34 times Mark. In our verses this morning, Mark 3:7-9, we see the word crowd used three times. Some were curious, some were skeptical, but most were fans. As we continue to answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" from the Gospel of Mark, we will see who Jesus is, and it will compel us to step up. It's as if he is giving us an invitation to stand out from the crowd and become a follower of Jesus instead of a fan of Jesus.

Do you see yourself as a follower or as a fan of Jesus? It's an important question for all of us to consider. Last week Kevin showed us the heart of God. We saw Jesus' compassion when he healed the man with the shriveled hand on the Sabbath. We saw him defend his disciples when they were hungry and picked food on the Sabbath, and we saw Jesus' love when he said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Meaning that God made the Sabbath to bless and refresh his followers, not to burden them with manmade rules and traditions.

Then we saw Jesus declare his own authority over all of God's laws when he said, "*So the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath*" that's when Mark tells us that the Pharisees and Herodians were not followers of Jesus; in fact, they were not even fans. In Mark 3:6, Mark writes, "*Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.*" The religious Jews (the Pharisees) and the secular Jews (the Herodians) began plotting together how they might murder Jesus. The Pharisees and the

Herodians were enemies, but Jesus was their common enemy. It's that old adage, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." So they formed a sinister alliance to stop Jesus.

After Jesus healed the man in the synagogue, Mark says Jesus withdrew.

**Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. When they heard about all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. Mark 3:7-9**

We have noticed that Mark moves fast from one scene to the next. His writing is like an unfolding saga that moves rapidly. Occasionally, Mark stops the action, like pausing a video, to give us a snapshot. Verses 7-12 is one of those summaries where Mark lets his readers take a break and look back on where they have been.

So Jesus pulls away from the crowd around the synagogue in Capernaum and goes down to the beach with his disciples, and we know Peter, Andrew, John, James, and Matthew are included in the group. The mega-growing crowd follows him.

His fame is spreading. Fans came from Judea to the south, and fans from the city came out from the capital city of Jerusalem. From Idumea, which is from the southeast, came those who were a mixture of Jew and Gentile, whose ancestors were the Edomites, descendants of Esau. And the crowds came from the desert regions east of the Jordan and then from Tyre and Sidon, which were to the northwest along the Mediterranean coast. These were Gentiles, descendants of the ancient Phoenicians.

What's the point? The crowds, the fans of Jesus, came from all over, from every race and background, and they had come because they heard that Jesus could heal the sick and cast out demons. They were desperate.

They had never seen anyone like Jesus, and they saw Jesus as one with authority. If we understand that Jesus has authority, we should receive Jesus' invitation to step out and become a follower instead of a fan.

**For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before**

**him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him. Mark 3:10-12**

As we have seen so far in Mark, Jesus performed incredible miracles healing people with a word, a touch, or just a glance. Have you noticed that the demons are the only ones who correctly identify Jesus as the Son of God?

Every time the demons encountered Jesus, they screamed. The demons are spiritual beings. They set up residence in the natural world. They are known to possess people who open themselves up to them. What we see here are demon-possessed people where demons take over the possessed person's vocal cords. But look at what happens when these inferior demons encounter the superior Jesus. The demons scream and collapse in front of the one who is superior.

No religious leader, no disciple, had correctly called Jesus out as the Son of God! Only these demons recognized his authority. In fact, the first person to rightly proclaim Jesus as the Son of God was a Roman soldier who witnessed his crucifixion. These verses remind us that Jesus has the power to reverse the curse in both the natural world and the spiritual world, and that sent the demons into a panic.

How ironic that up to this point, the greatest testimony that Jesus is the Son of God came from the confession of demons. And Jesus didn't need publicity from demons. People might mistake Jesus for being in partnership with demons. So Jesus shuts them up and tells them not to scream out what they know to be true.

Jesus invites us to step up and become followers instead of fans because only Jesus, the Son of God, has authority over diseases and demons. And another reason we can say that Jesus invites us to step up and become followers instead of fans is that Jesus chooses to use ordinary people like us to accomplish his purposes.

Jesus, the Son of God, accomplishes his purposes by using ordinary people just like us.

*"Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him" (Mark 3:13).* We can't see it clearly in Mark, but in the other gospel accounts, it says that he spent the night on that mountain in solitude, no doubt praying and communicating with his Heavenly Father about those who he would invest the next three years with. It was such an important decision. His death was imminent. His enemies were already plotting it. And after he is gone, who is going to carry the message? Mark says he summoned the ones he wanted. He summoned those who would be eyewitnesses to all he would do in his ministry.

*"He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons"*

*(Mark 3:14-15).* What was Jesus looking for in the 12 he appointed? He wanted followers, not fans. He called those who were drawn by faith, who would willingly leave everything behind to follow him. And Jesus would invest in them. The word disciple is mathites which means learners. The word apostle means messengers. These 12 would be mathites and eventually become messengers, apostoloi. The sent ones.

What was his strategy? These are key insights for us.

### **Be in the presence of Jesus**

In order to become what Jesus called them to become, they needed to be in the presence of Jesus. The very first thing Jesus had for them and has for us is to spend time with him. Jesus desires his followers to hang out with him twenty-four seven. In this world of "do," Jesus wants us to first "be." The practice of presence is a phrase we will hear a lot more in the days ahead at CPC.

It's really not complicated. Followers spend time with Jesus. This is the essence of Jesus' training program. No big training manuals, just time. One of our staff said to me recently, completely unsolicited, "I love spending time with Jesus." Those were the most encouraging words I heard that day. I hope these verses encourage you to be intentional in spending time with Jesus every day.

### **Go and proclaim Jesus**

Then Jesus' vision for them was to go and take the gospel message to others. It's hard to share your faith. Many of us want to retreat from all the wickedness around us. Many of us want to insulate ourselves from the problems and pain of others. Our plates are full; we all have our own struggles and little margin.

It seems to me that it is becoming more difficult to share our faith. I read this week that 60 percent of Americans believe that if you try to convert somebody, you are being an extremist. That is a challenge, isn't it? Are we at CPC willing to be labeled extremist for simply sharing Jesus with others?

My advice. Start small. Begin by praying and then start sharing. Celebrate successes. Share with your small group when you are able to have gospel conversations. Rejoice when God saves someone. That's why we love to do baptisms at CPC.

### **Use the Power of Jesus**

This passage reminds us that whenever we go into the presence of Jesus and whenever we go and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus, Satan and his demons go crazy. And I'm encouraged by what Jesus said to his earliest followers who stepped out from the crowd. *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).* You may be looking at this and saying, I am so unqualified to step up and

be a follower. Let's look closer at these 12 ordinary men who were called to step up.

*These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means 'sons of thunder'),* (Mark 3:16-17). Simon Peter is always the first name on these lists. Simon was the name Jesus called him after he failed or bailed. Peter is the name Jesus gives him to remind him of who he is supposed to be, the rock, the leader, the preacher.

James and John were the next two, and they, along with Peter, made up the inner circle with Jesus. The term sons of thunder likely meant that Jesus saw them as hot heads. Maybe Jesus gave this name to remind them of what they were not supposed to be. Remember, they wanted Jesus to rain fire down on the Samaritans.

*"Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him"* (Mark 3:18-19). We don't know much about Andrew except that he was Peter's big brother and was also a fisherman. Just an ordinary guy.

As you go down the list, it was a group of young 20-somethings, no rabbis, no professional theologians, or refined guys from Jerusalem. There was Thomas, who struggled with doubt. There was another James. History records him as having the nickname, James the lesser, the micros, which some say was a nickname because he was a very short man. He was probably teased as the little guy.

Then there was Thaddaeus. The name Thaddaeus was probably given by Jesus, which means mama's boy. You know, just as James got teased for being a micro, so Thaddaeus, the mama's boy, must have got it from the guys. Simon was a zealot, a political revolutionary, and an anarchist. Zealots would carry short daggers in their tunics, and in his circles, it was considered honorable to sneak up on a Roman soldier and stab him to death. And then Judas Iscariot was always the last one on the list. And after Judas hung himself, he was replaced by Matthias in Acts 1.

No one would think that this motley crew could change the world. That this group of apostles, along with Paul, would be the recipients of divine revelation, the true teachers of sacred doctrine, and the foundation stones of the church, according to Ephesians 2:20.

When we think of apostles, we think cream of the crop, the noblest, skilled, worthy of being memorialized on stained glass in cathedrals. But this group wasn't anything like that. Nothing made sense about bringing them together. But as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1, God isn't interested in using the wise or clever. He used the foolish to shame the wise.

God invites ordinary people like you and me to step up and become followers instead of fans. It's important for us to see that when we believe and then follow Jesus, we are following the Son of God who executes power over his accusers.

### **Jesus, the Son of God, executes power over his accusers**

Most of the crowd might answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" by saying, Jesus is a good teacher, a good man. And some who saw him up close would say that God would use Jesus to heal in ways they had never seen before. That God would use Jesus to set people free from demons in ways that they had never seen before. But for Jesus to claim to be God was just too much for most to accept. Even his own family couldn't accept all that they had seen and heard about him.

**Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." Mark 3:20-21**

Accusations actually came from his family. Maybe his family was motivated to say what they said due to the threats against Jesus from the religious leaders. Whatever their motivation, they announced that Jesus was crazy. They accused the Son of God of being a lunatic. We know that Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph, believed. Angels visited them and told them that their child was special and would grow up to save people from their sins.

But his siblings weren't buying it. Imagine your big brother actually being perfect. They must have seen him as an odd child. A wise young boy, a perfect teenager, so different from them and their friends. The phrase "take charge of him" is the same wording as "arrest by force." Later his family would have a full understanding, and they would believe and follow. So his family's ignorance here is forgivable.

This next accusation was sinister. It came from the teachers of the law. Their answer to the question of who Jesus is: *"And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons'"* (Mark 3:22).

So the teachers of the law, the big boys from Jerusalem 90 miles away, heard about Jesus, and now they are involved. They accused Jesus of being a liar. And even more sinister, they accused him of being possessed by Beelzebul, the prince of demons. Beelzebul was a name for Satan. Beelzebul literally means Lord of the dung heap or Lord of the flies. They accused Jesus of being in cahoots with the vilest and most evil figure known.

They knew that an accusation of insanity couldn't explain the miracles. Jesus had to be either from God or from Satan. And the belief that Jesus was from God was what the common people believed, and these leaders from Jerusalem had to change that.

So if the lunatic label didn't work, then they had to portray Jesus as a very bad man, a great liar, and a massive deceiver trying to convince people that he is the Son of God.

*"So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: 'How can Satan drive out Satan?'" (Mark 3:23).* A parable means to lay something alongside. Parables are used to try to explain something that people don't understand. So to help them understand, you lay something they do understand alongside to make the harder concept understandable. So to shred their argument, Jesus lays out something that is logically impossible.

*"If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand" (Mark 3:24-25).* In other words, how can Satan cast out Satan? Good teachers always ask good questions. It is absurd to conclude that Satan is going around using Jesus to tear apart his own kingdom.

**And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house.**  
**Mark 3:26-27**

So Jesus' logical conclusion is that there is only one entity stronger than Satan and who is that? It's God. And who is Jesus? He is the Son of God who ties up or binds Satan and then goes into his domain and plunders his house. So Jesus exposes the demons, dismisses the demons, and by plundering, he means he sets people free who have been possessed by demons.

Luke 10:17 states, *"The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.'" I hope you understand that the one who invites us to step up and follow has unlimited power, and he uses his power to accomplish his purposes through us. Be encouraged when you pray. Be encouraged when you share. Be encouraged as you comfort others. Be encouraged in times when obstacles seem insurmountable.*

In verses 28-29, Jesus gives a severe warning to those making the charge that Jesus is from Satan. Jesus says, *"Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3:28-29).* Is there a type of sin that is unforgivable? If so, what is it, and is it possible that we have committed the unforgivable sin?

Many have suggested that certain heinous acts can be unforgivable sins. Sins such as murder or adultery. Some traditions have suggested that suicide or self-murder is unforgivable. These are horrific destructive sins, but they are not unforgivable sins. King David committed both adultery and murder, yet David knew God had forgiven him.

So what is the unforgivable sin? Jesus says it's the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. What is unique about blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? Jesus was very clear that all his ministry was

accomplished on earth through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' power came from God's spirit. Jesus' accusers were charging him with doing his ministry by the power of the devil. They accused him of being in unity with Satan, not in unity with God. *"He said this because they were saying, 'He has an impure spirit'" (Mark 3:30).*

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a sin of unbelief. It's carried out with the mouth or through the pen. It's desecrating the name of God. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit comes from a person who has witnessed what God is doing. From a person who has seen God's miracles and transformed lives. They are not ignorant. They know the word of God, and yet they turn their back on what is obviously a work of God. And not only do they turn their back, but they also claim that a work of God is instead a work of Satan.

For us, let's be clear. The unforgivable sin has nothing to do with a season of doubt when we struggle with faith or about a struggle we have with a recurring sin in our lives. It is not about a time when God seems distant to you.

The unforgivable sin is knowing full well that God is real, present, and working, and instead of giving God the glory, you attribute the miracle, the expression of God's power, to Satan and his demons.

The good news is that for those of us who believe the gospel and have accepted the work of Jesus on the cross on their behalf and who have received the gift of salvation, we are saved and secure. We cannot commit the unforgivable sin.

I don't believe that any true Christian has committed the unforgivable sin. If you worry about having committed it, you haven't. If you mourn your sin and feel bad about it and know that you have sinned against God, you have not committed the unforgivable sin. It is committed by people who have the full knowledge of God, have seen his glory, and knowingly slandered God and call out a true work of the Holy Spirit to be a work of the devil.

So we finish this morning with a look at the last five verses of chapter 3. Let's remember that Jesus invites us to step out from the crowd to become followers instead of fans. So Mark circles back to Jesus and his family. And as followers, Jesus does something big for us.

### **Jesus, the Son of God, invites us to be His family**

**Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."**  
**Mark 3:31-32**

You know, when our moms want something from us, we generally defer to them. And certainly, in Jesus' day, it would be shocking for anyone to put something more important than their flesh and blood family.

**“Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” Mark 3:33-35**

Jesus is telling us that in his kingdom, there are spiritual relationships that are deeper than family relationships of flesh and blood. This relationship begins when we accept, on faith, God’s invitation to believe and follow him. Jesus invites us into a new family, which is far superior to the human family. It is an eternal family. And we who are invited into his new family are far dearer to him than his human family.

Can there be any more positive reason to step up and follow Jesus than the reward of being brought into his eternal family? May God grow in you, even today, a greater sense of family with God and his people.

I encourage you to receive the invitation from Jesus to stand out from the crowd. Become a follower of Jesus instead of a fan of Jesus. I’m sensing that the Holy Spirit will work through this passage, that he will reveal a specific step for each of us. That in some specific and personal way, he will show us how to stand out from the crowd and become a follower of Jesus instead of a fan of Jesus.

I think there is a warning here for some of us. A warning for those who persist in unbelief. Don’t put off a decision to follow Christ. If you die in a state of unbelief, your sins will not be forgiven. Receive Christ’s invitation to follow, step out from the crowd, and repent and believe in Jesus.

Perhaps there are some of us here who are buried under guilt and shame. If you believe in Jesus and are worried that you have committed the unforgivable sin, you haven’t. If you’re mourning and grieving about your sin, that’s a good thing; it means that the Holy Spirit is active in your life. Satan is the one lying. Be comforted by the truth of God today.

There are some of us that think we are far too ordinary to be used by God. Remember, God wants to use the weak in this world, the foolish, to shame the clever ones in this world. God wants to display his strength through our weaknesses.

So here is our charge. As a follower of Jesus, receive the directions he gave his Apostles. Practice being in the presence of Jesus every day—silence, solitude, prayer, and scripture. Tell others about what Jesus means to you. That’s what followers do to display the glory of God.

If you are frightened today, if evil is oppressing you, if the devil seems closer to you than God, remember who has power over the demons and disease and over everything else that causes you to fear. Jesus is inviting us to go deeper this morning. May the Holy Spirit give us faith to stand out from the crowd and take that next step to become a fully devoted follower.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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