**From Fans to Followers**

Mark 3:7-19

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What do you think of large crowds?

* A record crowd of 170,000 watched the Kentucky Derby in 2015.
* Over 115,000 fans gathered to watch Michigan play Notre Dame in 2013.
* 3.5 million attended the largest ever rock concert in 1994.
* The largest religious crowd on record was when 30 million Hindus gathered to bathe in a river in the hopes of having their sins washed away.

The definition of a crowd helps explain why some of us shy away from them: *“A large number of people gathered together, typically in a disorganized or unruly way.”* Synonyms include: *throng, horde, mass, multitude, pack, mob,* and *rabble.*

Jesus drew a lot of crowds. In fact, in the Gospel of Mark alone, the word “crowd” appears 34 different times.

Check out Mark 3:7-9 where we see the word used three times: ***“Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him.”***

Last week we viewed the opening verses of Mark 3 through the perspective of a humble-hearted man, through the lenses of some hard-hearted religious dudes, and from the view of the holy heart of Jesus. We paused and asked ourselves if our hearts are humble, hard or holy.

After experiencing intense opposition in the synagogue, Jesus now withdraws with his disciples, something he did 11 different times in the Gospel of Mark. Mark 6:32 is an example: ***“And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.”*** In this instance, as well as in our passage today, the crowds pressed in on Jesus, thus keeping the disciples from having some quiet time with Christ.

Twice we see the crowd described as ***“great,”*** which means, *“much, many, a multitude.”* People traveled great distances to be with Jesus – some lived nearby (Galilee) but others traveled for days (Judea and Jerusalem, Tyre and Sidon), and weeks (Idumea and beyond the Jordan) to get there. Interestingly, Idumea is where the descendants of Esau lived. Historically, the Edomites were the archenemies of Israel and were known to be wicked and rebellious. It’s cool that people that far away, both geographically and spiritually, were drawn to Jesus. So many people came to Christ that He used a boat as his pulpit so that they wouldn’t ***“crush him,”*** which means,*“to press together, and afflict.”*

We see from Mark 3:10-12 that Jesus did two main things when ministering to the crowds:

* **He healed many with diseases.** Look at verse 10: ***“For he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him.”*** Sick people were smothering the Savior. We see this from the phrase, ***“pressed around,”*** which means *“to throw oneself upon, to jostle.”*
* **He freed many with demons.**Check out verses 11-12: ***“And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, ‘You are the Son of God.’ And he strictly charged them not to make him known.”*** The diseased pressed around Him and the demonized ***“fell down before him.”*** This is a repeated action, which means that they *“kept on falling down.”* This shows the power of Christ. When they confessed who He was, He silenced them. He did that for two reasons. First, there was a common belief that the knowledge of one’s precise name conferred mastery over that person. By stating his title, the demons tried to show that they were superior. That didn’t work out so well for them. The second reason Christ quieted them was because He didn’t want or need testimony from them – He didn’t want to be associated in any way with unclean spirits. We’ll learn more about this next weekend when we look at the unpardonable sin.

We know from Mark 6:34 that Jesus didn’t dislike crowds but rather had compassion on them: ***“When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”*** While he cared for the crowds, His heart was that individual people would come to Him. We see this in Mark 8:34: ***“And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”***

In our world of social media, it’s easy to find “friends” or be a “fan” on Facebook or get “followers” on Twitter and Instagram. What we see in this passage is much deeper than a cursory connection on social media platforms.

Here’s our main idea today: *Jesus doesn’t want you to be a fickle fan but to become a faithful follower.* One pastor uses concentric circles to show how Jesus wants us to move from the *community* to the *crowd* to the *congregation* to the *committed* to the *core*. Where would you put yourself on this chart?

It’s easy for us to count a crowd but much more difficult to count converts. I’m trying to focus less on decisions for Christ and more on making disciples of Christ. I want to see movement from the community to the crowd to the congregation to the committed to the core, who then go back out to reach the community. Are you moving from *gathering* to *growing* to *giving* to *going with the gospel?*  It’s really not about our seating capacity but rather our sending capacity.

*Are you a fickle fan or a faithful follower?*

I like to ponder these words on a regular basis from Kyle Idleman in his book called, *Not a Fan.*

*“It may seem that there are many followers of Jesus, but if they were honestly to define the relationship they have with him I am not sure it would be accurate to describe them as followers. It seems to me that there is a more suitable word to describe them. They are not followers of Jesus. They are fans of Jesus…My concern is that many of our churches in America have gone from being sanctuaries to becoming stadiums. And every week all the fans come to the stadium where they cheer for Jesus but have no interest in truly following him.* [One of the] *biggest threats to the church today* [are] *fans that call themselves Christians but aren’t actually interested in following Christ. They want to be close enough to Jesus to get all the benefits, but not so close that it requires anything from them…One of the reasons our churches can become fan factories is that we have separated the message of ‘believe’ from the message ‘follow’.”*

In the rest of our passage we’re going to see the process Jesus uses to move people from being fickle fans to faithful followers.

In verse 7, Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea and the crowds came and clamored for Him. In verse 13 we see that ***“he went up on a mountain, called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him.”*** Hiking up a mountain would remind people of when Moses went up the mountain to select his leaders in Exodus 24. The mountain motif speaks of both revelation and redemption in the Bible. Luke 6:12 tells us that Jesus spent the whole night in prayer before he ***“called to him those whom he desired.”*** This shows the importance of protracted prayer before big decisions.

It’s interesting to note that the way it usually worked was that men would attach themselves to a teacher, like John the Baptist’s disciples did, but here we see that Jesus deliberately chose and called to Him those whom he wanted. I love how quickly they responded. He called…and they came! Oh, that we would come as quickly. We must also remember that unless we’re called, we won’t come as stated in John 6:44: ***“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”*** We don’t really choose Him; He chooses us. John 15:16: ***“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide…”***

**The Ministry Model of Jesus**

Let’s look now at the three-part strategy that Jesus uses to turn fickle fans into faithful followers. Notice verse 14: ***“And he appointed twelve (whom He also called apostles)…”*** The word ***“appointed”*** means *“to make,”* which shows that His plan is to mold and make us into the messengers He desires us to be. The number 12 is used 22 times in Revelation alone and refers to governmental perfection. More specifically the use of 12 apostles would have clearly communicated that Jesus was bridging from the 12 tribes of Israel to something brand new. Matthew 19:28 says, ***“Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel…”*** He is all about doing a new thing, using a new form, to build a new community, called the church.

*Jesus wants to move you from being a fickle fan to a faithful follower.* I see three key characteristics of faithful followers in verses 14-15.

**1. Be in the presence of Jesus.** The very first thing we are called to do is to spend time with Jesus: ***“…so that they might be with him.”*** Jesus desires His followers to hang out with Him. In a world of *“do,”* Jesus wants us to first *“be.”* When we’re with Him, we learn how He loves and how He handles people and what His priorities are. This is the essence of Jesus’ training program. There are no huge manuals filled with rules and regulations. He’s all about us living in relationship with Him.

Let’s ponder something that is both simple and startling: *You are as close to Christ as you want to be.* It’s simple because it makes sense but it’s startling because sometimes we think that there’s something keeping us from being close to Christ. Jason Crosby puts it like this: *“God will take you as deep with Him as you want to go.”* You and I must take responsibility for growing in our relationship with Christ. We’ve said it before but it bears repeating: *You won’t grow in discipleship without practicing the disciplines because spiritual growth is intentional, not automatic.*Proverbs 13:4: ***“The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.”***

Can I encourage you to go deep with Christ? Spend time with Him in prayer and reading His Word every day. I’ve been reading several chapters from the Gospel of Mark every day since January 1st. My goal is to read the entire Gospel 20 times. I’m doing this not just so I can check off a box but so I can get to know Jesus better. What’s your plan to be in the presence of Jesus and to practice His presence throughout the day? If you aim at nothing, you’ll hit it every time.

Listen. When you spend time in the presence of Jesus, people will notice. Acts 4:13: ***“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.”***

**2. Go and proclaim Jesus.** First, we’re to come and be with Jesus and second, we’re to go with the gospel to others. We must be in the presence of Jesus and then we must go and proclaim Jesus. Look at the next phrase of verse 14: ***“…and He might send them out to preach.”*** The words ***“send them out”*** make up the root for the word ***“apostle.”*** An apostle is a “sent one.” One of the churches in the Quad Cities challenges their members to *“live sent.”* I like that. That’s what we’re trying to do by keeping our *“Go”* value in front of everyone. We gather, we grow, and we give *so that* we can go with the gospel. The word ***“preach”*** means to, *“act as a herald, to sound forth the message of the king.”*

There are four ways we can respond to an increasingly evil world.

* **Isolate.** At times in church history, the world was so wicked that some believers retreated to monasteries.
* **Insulate.** It’s not easy to isolate so some people choose to insulate themselves from the problems and pain of those who don’t yet know Christ.  These people spend almost all their time with other Christians and when they do have conversations about lost people their words are often judgmental.  One of my pastor friends put it like this: We have to stop thinking “us vs. them” and move toward “us *for* them.”
* **Imitate.** I’m afraid this is where the majority of believers end up.  When we don’t spend time with Jesus we can end up blending in with those who don’t know Jesus. This person just wants to fit in and ends up caving into the culture.
* **Infiltrate.** This is the heart of Jesus.  *We must break down barriers and build bridges with those who don’t yet know Christ* by proclaiming the gospel to those who are lost.

In our increasingly secular society, it is becoming more difficult to share our faith. According to a brand new book by David Kinnaman called, *Good Faith: Being a Christian When Society Thinks You’re Irrelevant and Extreme,* 60% of Americans believe that if you try to convert somebody you are an extremist. That’s a challenge, isn’t it? Are you willing to be labeled an extremist for simply sharing Jesus with others?

John and Tiffany Markum and a team from Edgewood moved to San Jose three years ago to plant a church. They are truly living in an area that sees Christians as irrelevant and even extremist. Pastor John was on staff here for five years and they are back with us this weekend. Let’s show our appreciation to them as John comes up.

1. What are some ways that LifeCity Church has embraced the value of going and proclaiming Jesus to the Silicon Valley?

2. Could you share a highlight from these past three years?

3. What’s one of the unique challenges you’re facing right now?

Pastor John will be preaching Sunday night at 6:00 p.m. I hope you’ll come and hear more about what God is doing in and through LifeCity church.

I read a post this week by Micah Fries that was quite challenging. Here’s part of what he wrote: *“Research has found only 25% of churchgoers have shared their faith once or twice over the last six months. The Evangelical church can claim to be an evangelistic people - a church on mission - but the behavior betrays their belief. The facts are in and it is clear, the church has a behavior problem that is fueled by a belief problem.”*

Here are some simple suggestions to help us grow in our go value.

* **Do something.** Begin praying and then start sharing. I like what D.L. Moody said when someone complained about the way he shared his faith: *“I like the way I do evangelism better than the way you don’t do evangelism.”*
* **Start small.** As the weather warms up (eventually), make a renewed effort to get to know your neighbors. Go on walks in your neighborhood. Hang out in the front of your house and not in your backyard. Intentionally pour into your family members. I like the first thing Pastor Tim wrote on his April monthly report: *“Took a week’s vacation to start discipling my newest grandchildren.”*
* **Use resources.** One of my favorite things is to put gospel resources in your hands and to watch you share them with lost people. Thanks to some generous people, we have free copies of *Anchor for the Soul* by Ray Pritchard, *How Good is Good Enough* by Andy Stanley, a booklet called *Soul Satisfaction* and some brand new copies of *If I Believe, Why Do I Doubt* by Ray Pritchard. They’re available on the round table in the lobby. Related to this, I love that over 20 students went to the *Dare2Share* evangelism conference this weekend.
* **Celebrate successes.** Share with others when you’re able to have a gospel conversation. Rejoice when God saves someone. That’s why we make such a big deal about baptisms – there are four coming up in the next several weeks. That’s also why we shared 10 different testimonies at our *Comeback* Easter services.

First, be in the presence of Jesus and second, go and proclaim Jesus. That leads to the third element of the Savior’s strategy.

**3. Use the power of Jesus.** When proclaiming the gospel, it’s critical to not do so in your own strength and abilities as stated in verse 15: ***“and have authority to cast out demons.”*** The word ***“authority”*** has the idea of having delegated authority, permission to use power.

I’m reminded of Acts 1:8: ***“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.”*** This was certainly evident in the early church as seen in Acts 4:33: ***“And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”*** Are we seeing this kind of power today? If not, there’s a short-circuit somewhere.

I’m reminded that whenever we are in the presence of Jesus and whenever we go and proclaim the gospel of Jesus, Satan and his demons go crazy. I won’t go into a lot of details but the days before Easter in my life were filled with spiritual warfare and the time since has been a battle as well. I’m thankful that I woke up Thursday morning with a renewed sense of the authority I have in Christ to overcome the evil one.

I think I know what some of you are thinking right now. You believe that you’re not qualified enough to be used by Jesus. I like how one pastor put it: *“Jacob was a cheater, Peter had a temper, David had an affair, Noah got drunk, Jonah ran from God, Paul was a murderer, Gideon was insecure, Miriam was a gossip, Martha was a worrier, Thomas was a doubter, Sara was impatient, Elijah was moody, Moses stuttered, Abraham was old…and Lazarus was dead. God doesn’t call the qualified; He qualifies the CALLED!”*

In verses 16-19, we’re introduced to the guys He called to join His team: ***“He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.”***

This list is not haphazard or without meaning. Please don’t tune out like many of us do when we’re slugging through the list of names in the Book of Numbers. Here are some observations that I think you will find encouraging:

* Peter is always first on the 4 different lists found in the New Testament. His name means Rock and is thought of as the leader, even though he failed and bailed on Jesus.
* James and John are the next two, and along with Peter, they make up the inner circle. They are given the name ***“Boanerges,”*** which means Sons of Thunder. That was either a compliment because they had booming voices that were good for preaching or more likely it referred to their impetuousness when they later wanted to call fire down from heaven on the Samaritans in Luke 9:54. They were also prone to selfishness as seen in Mark 10:35-39 when they were positioning for some power slots in Christ’s cabinet.
* While we know a lot about the first three and a little bit more about the next three, we don’t know much at all about half of them. They were just ordinary guys who were insignificant and imperfect.
* This was a motley crew, made up of misfits. It’s fair to say that none of them would have been voted as “most likely to succeed” by their yearbook committees. There are no rabbis or professional theologians or refined guys from Jerusalem on the list.
* They were all young twenty-something men. This is a good reminder for us older guys to make sure we’re pouring into the next generation. They were the first century millennials. That’s why I’m so glad that we are hiring a Youth and Young Adults pastor! Kyle Parks and his wife Liesl will be with us in three weeks. A letter just went out to members with more information. I’m also thrilled that almost 100 men have signed up for the Iron Sharpens Iron Conference this Saturday and am thrilled that 30 millennials are going!
* Many of the names are listed in pairs, which is precursor to how Jesus later will send them out two-by-two on missionary journeys as seen in Mark 6:7. BTW, I’m thrilled that 19 people will be going to Puerto Rico this summer.
* There are pairs of brothers on the list. This reminds us of the importance of family connections and the intentionality of sibling serving, not sibling rivalry. If you have a sibling, have you ever thought about how you can serve together?
* There was natural tension on this team. There were four foul-smelling fisherman, a doubter and a betrayer huddled up with Jesus. How do you think Matthew the tax collector who worked for Rome and Simon the Zealot who hated Rome got along? This reminds me that we can’t pick our natural family or our spiritual family. Guess what? We’re stuck with each other so we might as well learn how to serve alongside one another.

Imagine what the resumes of the twelve disciples would have sounded like to a search firm.

*Dear Sir: Most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.*

*Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings.*

*One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, has a keen business mind, and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious, and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. All of the other profiles are self-explanatory. We wish you every success in your new venture.*

Listen. If Jesus can use a rag tag team like this to turn the world upside down, can’t He use you and me? And He will, if we fully surrender to Him. *Jesus doesn’t want you to be a fickle fan but to become a faithful follower.*

**No Other Plan**

A legend recounts what happened when Jesus returned to heaven after his time on earth. The angel Gabriel approached Him and said, *“Master, you must have suffered terribly for men down there.”*

*“I did,”* Jesus replied.

*“And,”* continued Gabriel, *“do they know all about how you loved them and what you did for them?”*

*“Oh, no,”* said Jesus, *“not yet. Right now only a few people in Galilee know.”*

Gabriel was perplexed and questioned, *“Then what have you done to let everyone know about your love for them?”*

Jesus said, *“I’ve asked Peter, James, John, and a few of my friends to tell other people about me. Those who are told will in turn tell others and my story will be spread to the farthest reaches of the globe. Ultimately, all of mankind will hear about my life and what I have done.”*

Gabriel frowned and looked rather skeptical. He knew full well what humans were made of. *“Yes,”* he said, *“but what if Peter and James and John grow weary? What if the people who come after them forget? What if way down in the twenty-first century, people just don’t tell others about you? What then? Haven't you made any other plans?”*

And Jesus answered, *“I haven’t made any other plans. I’m counting on them.”*

Twenty centuries later, he still has no other plan. He is counting on us.

Fans will never accomplish this. Only followers will. Are you a fan or a follower?

Men and women are His method. His plan is people like you...and like me.

1. Be in the presence of Jesus
2. Go and proclaim Jesus
3. Use the power of Jesus

When Jesus considers a crowd like this, He is calling individuals to move from being fickle fans to faithful followers. Are you ready to follow?

**Closing Song: “I Will Follow”**

**\*\*\*Betty Roth Membership and Rudy and Maria Ramos \*\*\*\* – 10:45 service**