

Nothing is hidden that will not be revealed

Readings: 2 Samuel 12:1-15, Mark 4:21 – 25

In our studies in Mark's gospel we come to this short passage of 5 verses in the middle of chapter 4. Much of Mark is action based, lots of little incidents of the interactions between Jesus and individuals or groups, but here in Mark 4 we have a summary of some of His teaching, particularly His use of parables.

Mark 4 begins with the parable of the sower, which describes the different ways in which the gospel message was and is received by different people. Jesus then privately explains the parable to His disciples. We now come to the passage before us in verses 21-25, before Mark continues his description of His public teaching with two more parables. However these five verses present us with something of a quandary. Why does Mark choose to put these sayings here? What is Mark trying to tell us about the person and work of Jesus. What is Mark's train of thought? I must confess to have grappled with these verses over the last few weeks as I have prepared this sermon. Sometimes sermon points jump out at you as you read the passage, sometimes you have to dig. These words are challenging - nothing is hidden that will not be revealed. So I hope, by God's grace, that I can throw some light on the first two verses at least, especially about the light and how it spreads and reveals God's truth.

Firstly, we need to remember that each of the four gospels contain a selection of Jesus' teaching, He taught far more than the gospel writers recorded. John tells us in John 21 that "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). It is also very likely that He gave similar teaching on a number of separate occasions. This explains why the same phrases and teachings can occur in different places in the different gospel narratives. So these words which together occur in verses 21-25 of Mark 4, occur separately in Matt 5:15, 7:2, 10:26 and 13:12. They also occur separately in Luke 8:16-18, 11:33 and 12:2-3.

So turning to the verses before us, Jesus refers to the lamp placed on the stand to spread its light. The parable of the sower is all about how we hear and respond to the gospel, and the words about the lamp and the measure carry forward those ideas. The lamp is a picture of Jesus, the light of the world, the incarnate word of God. Just as the harvest is valuable, so the light is valuable. Indeed from a biological point of view it is the sunlight that drives the plant growth to give us the harvest. As Galileo delightfully said "The sun, with all those planets revolving around it and dependent on it, can still ripen a bunch of grapes as if it had nothing else in the universe to do."

Jesus, the light of the world, comes not to be hidden but to illuminate, just like a lamp is put on a stand to give light to the house. (Or the lights placed up high in the church to illuminate us all.) However, this idea of being hidden and then visible is a common picture in the scriptures.

We've just spoken of the parable of the sower, where the seed is hidden in the soil and then appears to sight as a shoot as it grows up into the light and finally bears fruit.

To many the person of Jesus was hidden during His earthly life, they didn't see or understand who He was, until sometime after His death and resurrection. At Pentecost, Peter preached to many of them and clearly said "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Many of the crowd were cut to the heart when they heard this and earnestly asked what must we do? Peter replied "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). In other words, receive the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You didn't see who He was before but now, by God's grace, you do. What was hidden has now become known. Or to put it another way, the truth had dawned upon them, and so it has continued from that day, as the truth dawns on all who, in faith, turn to Him.

The followers of Jesus have continued to spread the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, for Jesus told His disciples that they also were the light of the world; Matthew 5:14-16 says "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Paul uses similar imagery "at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8).

But the light that Jesus brings not only needs to spread out to the world around us, but also to spread out into the whole of our lives. It is not meant to be carefully placed out of sight, filed under "religion" in the recesses of our minds and dusted off each Sunday or buried in the ground like the man did with his one talent. It is meant to illuminate the whole of our lives, to take over our lives, to shine into every corner. We get an inkling of that in the next verses where Jesus talks about more being given to the one who has but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away (v25). In the spiritual realm the light is shining ever more strongly or it is fading away.

Light illuminates, it makes things visible, even things that we would prefer not to see or others to see. Three of us were sitting in church last Monday morning and the sun was streaming through the windows and Margaret Martin said "I'd like to take a

broom and clear out all the cobwebs on the window sills". The strong sunlight revealed the cobwebs that under cloudy conditions were far less visible.

Verse 22 of Mark 4 says "For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light." This is amplified in Luke "Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops" (Luke 12:2-3). The gospel is meant to shine into the whole of our lives and transform us.

We need to take to heart that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all; He is the all-knowing, all seeing God. As the writer to the Hebrews says "no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13). At His second coming Paul says, Jesus "will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart" (1 Cor. 4:5). Perhaps in our day we don't think enough about the second coming and its encouragement to godly living. We overlook the fact that so many of the parables are pointing to the final judgement, the final harvest. We need to remember that in the book of Revelation, when John saw the glorified Lord Jesus, His eyes were like a flame of fire (Rev. 1:14). We too easily miss the two way meaning of those familiar words in 1 Cor. 13 "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Christians in previous generations were very careful to examine their lives in great detail and confess to God their short comings in a way that I think is very foreign to us today. Perhaps we skip over the confession section of our service too easily. Has the Almighty become the all matey? Nothing is hidden from God, now that can be very scary but it can also be very reassuring and a source of all comfort.

It turned out pretty scary for David in our Old Testament reading. David knew the Scriptures, he knew what he had done was wrong but perhaps he thought God might overlook his deliberate sin, after all he was the king and kings in other nations did far worse things. I love David's passionate desire for justice as he listens to Nathan's story, David is really incensed by the obvious injustice portrayed, yet totally oblivious to his own sin. How easy it is for us to see sin in others and overlook our own sins, to pass them over with a few lame excuses - we were tired, it won't happen again and so on. We are masters of excuses; rather like Adam and Eve in the garden, passing the buck and trying to avoid admitting we were in the wrong. But David was prepared to listen to Nathan and admit his wrongdoing. Other monarchs might have ordered Nathan's death for such a presumptuous interruption to their day, but not David. When confronted with the truth he had no option but to agree with the verdict and confess his sin and seek God's forgiveness. The psalmist in Psalm 10 talks of the wicked who think in their hearts, "God has forgotten, He has hidden his face, He

will never see it." (Ps. 10:11) and who go onto say, that God will not call them to account (v 13). To which the psalmist replies, one suspects with great passion, "But God does see" (v 14) and will bring justice.

We confess our sins, not because we somehow take some kind of perverse delight in grovelling before God, but because He is our Father and we have let Him down. Sometimes I wonder if we really grasp how much God longs for us to be holy people and how desirable goodness really is. It seems to me that there are two opposite dangers, one is to belittle sin and treat it as something of no consequence, or else to take a morbid, fearful attitude where we expect God to take vengeance on us at any moment. Glory to God, we have a Saviour, Jesus His Son, in whom is forgiveness of sins but also the power to resist evil and to be transformed into His image by His Spirit's power. Hallelujah, what a Saviour! What a gospel!

But I said earlier that nothing is hidden from God, now that can be very scary but it can also be very reassuring and a source of tremendous comfort. The scriptures are full of words which declare that God knows our trials and our tears. He is the God of all comfort (2 Cor. 1:3). To each of the seven churches in Revelation, Jesus begins His message with "I know" about you. So to the church at Smyrna He says "I know your tribulation and your poverty" (Rev. 2:9). What comfort! Jesus is not immune to our suffering, He knows. In Psalm 56, David says "Be gracious to me, O God, for people trample on me; all day long foes oppress me; my enemies trample on me all day long, for many fight against me. O Most High" (Ps. 56:1-2) and then goes onto say "You have put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your record?" (Ps. 56:8). David is confident that God knows. Or those comforting words to Hezekiah, "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears" (Is. 38:5). Or again one of the most amazing verses in Scripture in Rev. 21 where John sees the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven and a loud voice from the throne says, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; He will wipe every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 21:3-4). God Himself will wipe away every tear from their eyes. He knows your tears. Nothing is hidden from Him.

The following poem by Mary Stevenson encapsulates this thought so well.

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.
Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.
In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.
Sometimes there were two sets of footprints,
other times there were one set of footprints.

This bothered me because I noticed
that during the low periods of my life,
when I was suffering from

anguish, sorrow or defeat,
I could see only one set of footprints.

So I said to the Lord,
'You promised me Lord,
that if I followed you,
you would walk with me always.
But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life
there have only been one set of footprints in the sand.

Why, when I needed you most, have you not been there for me?'
The Lord replied,
'The times when you have seen only one set of footprints in the sand, is when I
carried you.'

He knows your tears. Nothing is hidden from Him. The old negro spiritual had it
right "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Nobody knows but Jesus." It's true.

Perhaps there are some here that need to realise the full force of those words. He
has been with you in your sorrow, even when you felt He was far away, He was
there with you.

And some today are walking a hard road,
take encouragement and receive the truth that God has said, He will never leave you
or forsake you. He knows your sorrow and your burdens.

Nothing is hidden that will not be revealed, it is a truth that can be scary or a comfort.
But in the light of that truth, may the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the
face of Jesus Christ shine more strongly in our hearts and so transform us day by
day. Amen.