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Scripture: Mark 4:1

Text: Mark 4:1a -- "Again he began to teach beside the sea."

Topic: "Beside the Sea"

Proposition: Jesus' practice of frequently doing his teaching outdoors suggests that from and within our natural and daily surroundings we can learn from him effectively.

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Introduction:

1. A man was happily embarked on his first vacation in years. He wore clothing to match his carefree mood: orange-and-pink flowered sports shirt, bright green cap and red slacks.

When he was told to pull over to the side of the turnpike, he protested, "But officer, I don't understand! I wasn't speeding!"

"That isn't why I stopped you," said the cop. "I was just curious to hear the kind of noises you would make."

2. One of the two big reasons that people followed Jesus was that they wanted to hear the kind of noises he made. The other reason, of course, was to get him to heal themselves or their loved ones from sickness and deformity. Because of the tremendously different person he was from anyone they had known before, they followed him in such large crowds that he would speak to them wherever he could. This meant that

I. Jesus frequently taught outdoors.

1. We know that he gave some of

his greatest teachings outdoors. Earlier in the Gospel of Mark than our Scripture passage of today, in Mark 2:13 and forward, he is presented as going out "again beside the sea, and all the crowd gathered about him, and he taught them." The following chapter tells of him with his disciples going to the sea, with a great multitude following, "hearing all that he did.." The passage which is our Scripture text today says "Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land." It was on this occasion that he gave the parable of the sower whose seed fell on a path, on rocky ground, among thorns, and some into good soil. Matthew and Luke show him going "up on a mountain [redacted], where the famous Sermon on the Mount was given to a crowd. Many other incidents are recorded of Jesus doing his teaching outdoors.

2. Perhaps Jesus did so much outdoor teaching for various reasons,

with one reason being the compelling cause of being outdoors at one time, while another reason was the main cause for being outdoors at another.

a. Perhaps one of the big early reasons was that he was not welcome in the synagogues, the places of worship of his time and people. Luke presents Jesus as ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ at the beginning of his ministry teaching "in their synagogues" in Galilee. He tells of Jesus coming to his home town of Nazareth during that time, where he "went to the synagogue as was his custom", where he read from the book of Isaiah, then expounded on it in such a way and with such directness that the people there were so angry that they "led him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on whic the city was built, that they might th row him down headlong." However, he left them, and preached elsewhere in synagogues at times. There is gospel evidence to show that the synagogue leaders became increasingly hostile to him, however, so maybe he went outdoors much of the time because of this.

b. Perhaps one reason Jesus did so much outdoor work was that the crowds that followed him were too big to be handled in any of the buildings which were available to him. In a rural setting such as much of Palestine at that time, there was plenty of outdoor sitting room on the ground under the broad expanse of sky.

c. Perhaps a simple reason why he did so much outdoor preaching was that he liked it that way. The Sea of Galilee is a beautiful body of water surrounded by high brown hills which almost seem to cause the water to reach up to capture the blue of the sky, and it is inspiring and lovely. The Galilean people love it, and you can see why. The reputed site of the Sermon on the Mount is on a high now-green and wooded hill overlooking this beautiful and famous lake. Perhaps Jesus was outdoors to think and pray, and simply taught the people who came to him where he was.

d. Perhaps the people who came to him were naturally outdoor people, and to minister to many

people he had to be where they were. Even today, most of the people of his troubled land live in quite primitive housing, some even in tents. Certainly in his time there was no electricity for night lighting, or central heat or air conditioning. Each family depended on some garden plants and on animals for their food and clothing materials to a large extent, and this was an outdoor life. The tanned appearance of the typical Arab and Semite of mid-eastern lands was and is no appearance characteristic acquired to be stylish, like ~~the~~ a tan FROM the Florida tourist, but is the natural appearance of people who live outdoors most of the time.

E. I suspect that all of these factors we have mentioned played a part in the outdoor teaching practice of Jesus. One can only speculate, of course, but I would guess that his strongest reason for doing so much outdoor preaching is that this is where the majority of the people were.

Maybe the people were there because they had to be, maybe not.

Maybe some of them were like the youngster whose first day in school was not a happy one. "I don't like school," he declared, "but I've got to stay here till I'm 14."

To which the sympathy of the teacher was only lukewarm. "You are worrying about that?" she asked "Think of me. I have to stay here till I'm 65."

Well, at least the people to whom Jesus preached in the great and natural surroundings of his land had someone teaching them who was sympathetic with them.

II. Natural surroundings still are conducive to receptive hearing of Jesus.

1. Many people argue that they can worship God and know Jesus better when they are in the great outdoors than in a church or formal worship. This is not really so debatable, but the fact is that few people take the time to think of him when they're outdoors. They're usually too busy doing someing: mowing the grass, fishing, hunting, playing golf, watching the high school, college or

professional ball teams, watching the other people on the beach, or almost anything but thinking about and praying to God. Most of the time, not all of the time, is this true,

2. Because some church and other groups do make efforts to help people find the great help in nature which can point one toward God. That's why we have church camp sites in beautiful areas. That's why we make some effort to provide roving chaplains in National Parks and other recreational sites. That's why we draw so many inspirational illustrations from the world of nature.

3. We ~~will have to~~ recognize that in the crowded and urban capitalistic society in which we live, where space is at a premium and where everything has to be channeled into making a "buck," it is difficult to find and to use the beautiful natural surroundings. So many ~~of the~~ remaining beautiful natural areas are off limits to the public, because they are owned by large corporations or private individuals or government. They are put

off limits to the public quite often because the public has abused these areas. Recently the Secretary of the Interior and the daughter of the President in a trip by boat through some of the Big Cypress Swamp found beer cans to pick up in the heart of this deep-Florida backcountry. In the highest Colorado mountain country which we had penetrated on horseback I found the same trashy evidence of people's abuse of nature. No wonder that private and corporate owners and governmental controllers sometimes feel that the only way to preserve such beautiful areas is to put them off limits to most people. It is hard to find free access to some of the natural beauty nearest us, but too often it is our own fault. But when we can get out into it, THE OUTDOORS can tell us much of God. There, indeed, Jesus can still speak to us.

III. Jesus may also be heard within our manmade structures and daily routines.

1. There is a story about a motorist who loved animals and who therefore was quite distressed when he ran over

a rabbit (or a hare). He saw it lying in the road taking its lasts gasps. He stopped his car and went back to put the animal out of its misery, when another motorist stopped to offer help.

This man was a chemist, and he fetched a bottle of tonic from his car, placed it under the nostrils of the hare, and in a few seconds the rabbit revived and bolted through the bushes and across the field. "That's wonderful stuff," said the animal lover. "What on earth is it?"

Came a modest answer: "Hair restorer!"

2. Jesus uses many means to restore to us our confidence in God, in Him, in ourselves, to help us understand what life and death are all about.

3. Temples, synagogues, and churches are constructed to "glorify God," to provide shelter, protection and pleasant and beautiful surroundings in which to seek God. Some say that the organized religions have made the religious process too artificial and too easy; that ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ thereby they have blunted some of the sig-

nificance of worship. Be that as it may be, it is true that for most peopl today (but not for all) such surroundings are the settings within which they have or will have any religious and Christ-centered experiences in their lives. So we do need these structures and their organizations.

4. Less common but important sites in which to receive the truths of Jesus are the locations of the ordinary activities of our lives.

a. Our homes are places where we could have daily devotions. These can take the forms of regular usage, together or in private, of such helps as our own publication THE UPPER ROOM. Regular table grace before a meal, private devotional reading, the listening to radio broadcasts and the watching of TV religious programs, the playing of recordings, all are means which can HELP US ~~contribute to our~~ listening to and coming to know Jesus, right in our homes.

b. Our work areas are such places too, though it is ~~often~~ less

common to even think about God, Christ, and ultimate things amid the daily hustle of the job.

(1) You might think that the daily stuff of a minister's work would be such that he would have more time to think about religion and be close to God than anybody. This is not as true as we wish. The multitude of small details to which he must attend in even a small church keep him "busy" with trivialities, like most other people.

(2) In our work we do have a chance to practice sincere concern for and friendship towards other people; to be aware of their deepest feelings and longings. It's surprising how people respond to such concern. This way of being with people is in the example of Jesus.

(3) In the performance of our jobs we can try to work at tasks, in the first place, which are of constructive use for ourselves and others, then do them to the best of our ability.

Conclusion: To summarize,

1. Our Scripture of today shows that Jesus frequently presented his teachings outdoors.

2. This points out to us that we too can find Him still in the beauty of natural surroundings, if we will.

3. We should not forget that it is not practicial for most of us of today to get out into the largeness and freedom of nature MOST OF THE TIME, so our seeking of God and ultimate truth through Christ has to be done elsewhere. We can do it in our homes or in our work. The seeking and finding is up to us, for Jesus ~~is waiting us~~ WANTS US to come to him, as he always has.

4. Whether it is outdoors or indoors, at work or at play, whenever we come to him on our own, he does not disappoint, but gives us something to think about and by which to live.