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## The Man Who Taught By The Sea

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### Mark 4:1-3

Again [Jesus] began to teach beside the sea. And a very 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. And he taught them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: *“Listen! A sower went out to sow.”*

**A**t the end of the school year, the teacher was saying good-bye to her students when one little boy in her class raised his hand. “Teacher,” he said, “I sure to do like you. I like you so much I want to stay in the first grade forever, but you promoted me. I sure wish you were smart enough to teach me in the second grade, too.”

If you think back over your life and all the people who taught you how to live and how to work and how to learn - I imagine there was at least one person you wished were smart enough to teach you the next year, too.

Over the years,

there’s been at least one somebody who inspired you,  
one who opened a window to your imagination,  
one who turned a light on in your mind.

She or he was the one who started you thinking,

the one who stirred your desire to learn and opened up  
a whole new world of opportunity for you.

In this confusing and complex world, where a person can easily lose his way, everybody needs a wise and smart-enough teacher who can change his life.

It doesn't matter if you're going into the second grade or have finished your doctoral dissertation. It doesn't matter if you're seven years old or well past seventy. It doesn't even matter how smart you are already. I know a teacher for you.

I know a teacher who can still teach you a thing or two about life;  
who can still open your mind to new ideas;  
who can still open that door  
you always thought was barred shut.

You can meet him in today's scripture lesson. The Gospel of Mark calls him the man who taught by the sea.

When you read the gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - you'll see that there were several titles the people called Jesus. They called him Lord, Savior, the Son of God and the Son of Man. They called him the Lamb of God and the miracle-worker. They called him the Good Shepherd and the long-awaited Messiah.

Throughout the gospels there was one title they used more than fifty times. That title was translated three different ways. They called him Rabbi, Master, or teacher. All three mean teacher.

Even during his lifetime, Jesus was recognized as a great teacher. Today, we consider him the greatest teacher of all.

When you look back at what he taught, you realize that nobody else ever spoke the way he spoke. Nobody understood the motives, the hopes, the dreams, the fears, and the frustrations as he did.

Jesus was the man who taught by the sea. And if you are trying to make some sense out of this sordid world in which you live, maybe you need to listen and learn the lessons Jesus taught.

While his teachings have gone around the world and have lasted for two thousand years, Jesus himself didn't go very far. Most of his teaching took place in the area of ancient Israel called Galilee. In fact, most of his teaching took place right round the little city of Capernaum.

Capernaum is where Jesus lived as an adult. It was his home. It was where he had his headquarters.

He walked out from Capernaum and stopped at whatever town he came to next. When he got to the next town, Jesus always did the same thing. The first thing he did was head straight to the local synagogue.

There, he would teach anyone who was willing to learn. But most of his teaching was done out-of-doors, out in the wide-open spaces.

In today's scripture, Jesus was teaching by the sea. I want you to learn three things about the way Jesus taught.

**First**, when Jesus started teaching, right away, he attracted big crowds of people.

In today's scripture story, Mark wrote that the crowd was so big, it forced Jesus to back up. So many people had come to hear him teach, that Jesus had to back up, right to the water's edge of the Sea of Galilee. The people were coming so close to him, that in order to keep from getting pushed right into the water, Jesus got in a boat.

This story tells about that time when from the side of a boat, Jesus taught by the sea.

Why did people come to hear what Jesus had to say?

Some detractors today say that the people came in large numbers because Jesus was good entertainment. It was a way to pass some time. Jesus was a pleasant diversion in their drab and ordinary lives.

Back then, traveling preachers were pretty common. There were also magicians and exorcists who traveled up and down the ancient highways of Galilee. Whenever any of them stopped, some people would come to see the show.

You've got to remember that back then there were no movies, no television, no radio. These itinerant preachers and healers were just about the only thing in town. They provided a day's entertainment for the common folk.

That may have been the initial reason why some people came to hear what Jesus had to say, but it was clear, there was more to Jesus than just entertainment. There was something different about him. There was something that set him apart from all the rest.

One thing was his personality. The people were drawn to him. Reports from the time say that Jesus looked at people in a way nobody else had ever looked at them before. He let them know that he was genuinely concerned about them, that he cared about them. He was so caring that the people wanted to be close to him.

Now, that's something you can do, too. If you're lonely and isolated, if you feel like something's missing in your life, if you think

nobody much cares about you - you, too, can attract other people to your side. You can do that by showing them that you care.

Another thing that set Jesus apart from all the rest of the traveling preachers was the appealing nature of what he said. When Jesus spoke and taught, he didn't condemn people. He didn't point out their mistakes. He didn't tell them they were full of sin and going to hell. That's not what he said.

When Jesus spoke, he said words of comfort, words of hope, words of encouragement. His words made life better. His words made people more free: free from the restrictions and rules of their own religion, free from the weight of guilt and sin, free from regret. He didn't talk about how bad they were; he told them how they could live better.

That's something you can do, too. If you want to keep your friends, if you want to help your loved ones in any way - you need to be positive, you need to be cheerful, you need to open up a whole new way of life for them - a life of forgiveness, and understanding, and freedom.

When Jesus taught by the sea that day, and everywhere else, Jesus had a clear message. He spoke about God's love. He spoke about a strong faith. He spoke about courageous living. He spoke about joy.

His words still speak today. You need to hear his words.

The **second** thing I want you to learn from this man who taught by the sea, is that he taught in a clear and understandable form.

When the Gospel of Mark shares with us the time Jesus taught by the sea, Mark added this piece of information: "... [Jesus] taught them many things in parables..." [Mark 4:2]

The day Jesus taught by the sea is the day when he spoke his first parable. Mark introduced it this way: "... and in his teaching [Jesus] said to them: *"Listen! A sower went out to sow."* [Mark 4:2b-3]

Most of you know this tale. The seed is scattered. Some of it falls by the way and gets eaten by the birds. Some of it falls among the rocks and cannot take root. Some of it falls among the weeds and gets choked out. But some of it falls into good soil, and that seed produces a fine crop.

You know that story. You know what Jesus meant when he told that story. Jesus is the sower. His teachings are the seeds. The different soils stand for the different reception Jesus' words received in the hearts of different men and women.

That's the way Jesus taught. He often taught in parables. Parables are plain stories spoken to ordinary people. They were stories about life. They were stories the people understood, because those were the kind of things that happened to them every day of their lives. Those stories didn't have any secret meaning hidden away; they were stories that any average person could grasp and understand.

Jesus' teaching was different from most other teachers in his day, because he used these parables. Jesus was a story-teller. His stories were all about the common, everyday experiences of life.

But every one of his parables had a purpose. Every parable was a call to the people to come closer to the Kingdom of God. Every parable was to help them understand the way God wants His children to live. Elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus made it even easier to understand. Before he started his next story, Jesus would say,

*"The Kingdom of God is like..."*

*"... a treasure hidden in a field..."*

*"... a merchant in search of fine pearls..."*

*"... a net which was thrown into the sea..."* [Matthew 13:44-47]

His stories are the greatest stories every told. You know them all: the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, the Mustard Seed, the Pearl of Great Price.

You know them, and every one of them calls you to live closer to God's Kingdom. Every one of them calls you to come closer to God's will. Every one of them calls you to act more like a child of God.

The **third** thing I want you to learn about this man who taught by the sea is that his teaching always made a challenge.

The parable Jesus started in today's scripture story ends with Jesus saying, *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."* [Mark 4:9]

Jesus knew his story would strike a cord with his audience.

He knew they would understand.

And he issued a challenge: "You have to decide," he said, "which kind of soil your heart is going to be." "It's your choice," he said, "whether you take my words to heart and let them grow, or you throw them away."

He challenged them to learn, to grow, to change.

He still hasn't changed his mind. His challenge is still the same today. What are you going to do with the teachings of Jesus? Does he make a difference in how you live your life?

In these troubled and tumultuous times, with all the noise that going on in the world today, it seems that the message of Jesus has a difficult time getting through all the clamor and commotion. It seems as if we are all being bombarded by too many words and too much information. It is a curious side-effect that this great age of communication makes communicating very difficult.

But one thing is very clear and precise. Jesus still says: if you've got ears to hear, you will listen to his teachings.

Will you?

Will you choose to listen to Jesus?

Will you take his message into your heart?

Will you receive what Jesus says and let it filter through all the din and racket of the 21st century and let Jesus speak his words to you mind?

Will you listen to what he says and let it change your way of thinking, and...

let it alter your way of living,

and let it influence your values and ideals,

and let it help you make decisions,

and let it determine who you are,

and what you do?

Jesus still wants to know what you're going to do?

Will you be good soil?

Will his seeds of love and forgiveness grow in you?

Will his teachings take root and spring up,

and bear fruit in your every-day life?

Wonderful things can happen to you, when you listen to what Jesus has to say. Wonderful things can happen to you when you set out to seek the Kingdom of God.

A woman saw a little boy who had no shoes. It was a cold day, and her heart went out to him. She took him to Pay Less and bought him a new pair of sneakers and some warm, clean socks. He put them on and went running off without thanking her.

While she was happy about her own generosity, she was disappointed with his lack of appreciation. As she walked to her car, that little boy came running back to her. “Lady,” he said, “I forgot to thank you for my new shoes. And I was wondering,” he asked, “are you God’s wife?”

That question took her by surprise. She answered, “No, I’m not God’s wife. I’m just one of his children.” The little boy replied, “I knew it. I knew you were kin to God in some way.”

Wonderful things, marvelous things, happen when you hear what Jesus has to say. Maybe some day, somebody will take you for a member of God’s close family.

Mark told you: Jesus was the man who taught by the sea. His teachings were so appealing that the people flocked to hear what he had to say. His teachings were so down-to-earth, that the people understood what he taught. His teachings were so meaningful that they always challenged the people to a better way of life.

Even today, if you listen to what Jesus taught, if you re-read the gospel message, if you prepare the soil of your soul -

- you, too, will see good works sprout from your hands,
- you, too, will speak good words of life and love from your  
lips,
- you, too, will discover a treasure trove of good friends along  
your journey,
- and you, too, will some day be recognized as a sister or  
brother of Jesus Christ, himself.