

## Restraining God

1. Warm-up question: In 2016, an Israeli man named David Shoshan filed a petition in an Israeli court seeking a restraining order against God. If you could get an order directing God to make something happen (or to make something stop), what would it be? We'll get serious later, but for now keep it light. Pick a pet peeve of yours – something silly or trivial.
  
2. On Sunday, we focused on a pivotal experience in Mary's life. Jesus had launched his public ministry, but people weren't sure what to make of him. On the one hand, he was miraculously healing lots of people. Everyone was saying, "We have never seen anything like this!" Mark 2:12. On the other hand, Jesus was saying lots of "crazy" things like, "I am Lord of the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:28), and I have the power to forgive sins (Mk. 2:10), and love your enemies (Mt. 5:9), and offer to carry the gear of Roman soldiers an extra mile (Mt. 5:41), and do not take up the sword (Mt. 26:52), and do not fight for me because my kingdom is not of this world (Jn. 18:36). These statements seemed grandiose and also challenged the standard idea that the Messiah would be a great political and military leader who would defeat the Romans and usher in an unparalleled age of prosperity for Israel. As a result, many Israelites began to oppose Jesus, saying, "He has gone out of his mind!" That's when Mary made a fateful decision to intervene. Read Mark 3, selected verses, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. As we've just seen, Mary decided that Jesus needed to be "restrained." So she led a family delegation that included Jesus' brothers and sisters to do an intervention. The word translated "restrained" means "to use strength to seize or restrain." Why do you think Mary was so alarmed that she decided to intervene?
  - b. How do you think all of this felt to Jesus? What emotions might have been swirling inside him when his mother and siblings came to "restrain" him?
  - c. How do you think Mary felt when Jesus refused to talk to her and she was told that he said he had a new family now – his followers – what we today would call a family of choice (Mark 3:33-35)?
  - d. Why do you think Jesus refused to go out and talk to Mary and his siblings?
  
3. On the one hand, we could fault Mary for seeking to restrain Jesus. After all, she'd already been told to expect that her son would encounter great opposition and suffer much (Lk. 2:34), and that he was no mere mortal, but rather the Son of God destined to establish a kingdom that would never end (Lk. 1:33 and 35). So, in effect, Mary was trying to restrain God. On the other hand, we've all done similar things in our life. When things happen that make no sense to us, we also tend to resist, rebel, and seek to restrain. "God, move over and let me drive. I'll take the wheel from here because I don't like where your taking me."

- a. Tell us about a time in your life when something happened that made no sense and you fought it and resented it with all your might?
  - b. From the very beginning, we humans have resisted anything we don't understand. Adam and Eve were told not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. That made no sense to them. Why shouldn't they be able to know everything God knows? So they took matters into their own hands, with disastrous results. Why do we feel such an overwhelming need to understand everything that happens? Why can't we just accept that many things will happen that are beyond our ability to figure out?
4. Mary's experience is a stark warning to us of what can happen when we try to restrain God and take control. When Mary tried to seize control, Jesus had to move on without her. Thereafter, Mary completely disappeared from the story of Jesus, only resurfacing a couple years later at the crucifixion. In the meantime, Mary missed the opportunity to witness *the* most incredible things that have ever happened on the face of the earth and the chance to become Jesus greatest disciple. What a loss! But from Mary's experience, we learn an invaluable lesson that Jeff summarized this way: "Stop trying to control everything, stop trying to understand everything, and just meet life where it is. Find your purpose in whatever life serves up to you. Stop fighting the waves and start riding them. Our job is not to control life, but to harmonize with it."
- a. How do you feel about those words? Are they on target or not? Do they call to your heart or repel you – and why?
  - b. II Corinthians 5:7 says, "We walk by faith, not by sight." What do you think that means?
  - c. Jeff shared a story of a time when an exquisite Wynton Marsalis trumpet solo was interrupted by a silly ring tone. Magic ruined! Or so the audience thought, but not Marsalis. He rolled with it, incorporating the ring tone melody into his solo, then blending it back into the original song, in a masterful feat of improvisation. When in your life have you been able to do that? In other words, when has your life been interrupted by something that "wasn't supposed to happen," but you were able to embrace the disruption, make the most of it, and in the process find great beauty and meaning?
  - d. Jeff said, "We don't find life, life finds us." What do you think he meant? Do you agree or disagree?
  - e. As we approach the New Year, name an unwanted circumstance has intruded on your life? What might it look like for you to make the most of it? Are you ready to do that – or would you rather resist and resent?

### **Mark 3:7-11, 19-22, and 31-35**

7 Jesus departed with his disciples to the lake, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; <sup>8</sup>hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. <sup>9</sup>He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; <sup>10</sup>for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. <sup>11</sup>Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, 'You are the Son of God!'

<sup>19</sup>Then Jesus went home; <sup>20</sup>and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. <sup>21</sup>When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.'<sup>22</sup>And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.'

31 Then Jesus' mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup>A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.'<sup>33</sup>And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' <sup>34</sup>And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup>Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'