

You're on mute! How many Zoom meetings have you been in where you've heard those words?

Mute is a very useful button, not just on Zoom, on our tvs or phones if we need silence, just press mute.

Just over 2000 years ago there was a sound reverberating around Galilee that the Pharisees wanted to put on mute.

The sound of the gospel, the good news that the Kingdom of God was coming near in the person of Jesus. A kingdom where suffering and evil would be gone for ever, a kingdom that is open to sinners and scoundrels...

The sound of the kingdom was drowning out the sound of their religion and so they set out to put it on mute. And the only way to do that was to get rid of Jesus.

We left off last week in Mark's gospel with...

3:6 Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

Is that it then for the man from Nazareth? Is that it for the coming of the kingdom of God? Is it going to be stopped in its tracks?

Is this good news of a perfect kingdom just a flash in the pan? A story that went viral at the time but is now just a dusty old piece of history that hardly anyone really cares about? Maybe we should just skip to the end of Mark's Gospel and see that their plot to kill him worked and all go home, what a failure!

We're not going to do that. We're going to follow Mark's account as he takes us with Jesus first to a lake, and then up a mountain.

As this threat looms large we're going to see Jesus, fully in control, making sure that this plot to kill him will do nothing to mute the good news about the kingdom of God. If anything, it will turn up the volume so the sound of the kingdom reaches not just Galilee, not just Israel, but the ends of the earth.

And we need to hear this afresh today. If the gospel is not yet on mute it can feel like the volume is constantly being turned down. And so like Mark's first readers we need to have confidence that **Jesus is fully in control, his kingdom will keep coming and there is no mute button for the gospel.**

None of which depends on you or me, but if we are disciples of Jesus then it does involve us and we're going to see how.

1. Jesus captivates crowds (7-12)

3:7-8 Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. When they heard all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the region across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon.

Jesus is breaking new ground with crowds and crowds of people coming from Galilee and beyond, North, South, East & West, the sound of the kingdom is starting to go global.

The crowd was so big that Jesus asks his disciples to get a small boat ready in case he needs to go out into the lake. Everyone wants a piece of him and especially his healing touch.

Jesus might have infuriated the Pharisees but **he keeps captivating crowds.**

People are looking for help and hope and they sense that Jesus is the one who can offer it to them.

Jesus is not being muted, he's getting louder!

But there is a danger here that things could get out of control and develop into hysteria.

That's why he gets the boat ready I think and that's also why I think that he says what he says to the impure spirits who do recognise him.

3:11b-12 they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.' But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him.

This is the third and not the last time Mark has recorded Jesus seem to want to keep his identity a secret.

Which seems strange! Almost like he's reaching for the mute button himself?

There is a lot that can be and has been said about this so called Messianic Secret, but I think in this case at least, one of the big things Mark wants us to see is that Jesus is in control. He's not pressing mute, but he is saying that he will decide how and when his full identity is revealed and the volume reaches full blast.

Jesus is fully in control and his kingdom will keep coming.

We see this as he **captivates crowds** by the lake in Galilee and we see it as he continues to **captivate crowds** today. In an even bigger way.

Let's join him on a mountainside to find out how.

2. Jesus establishes his church (13-19)

3:13 Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him.

We're away from the pressing crowds now. It's just Jesus and a handful of his disciples.

If these verses seem a bit mundane at first there are two signs in verses 13 & 14 that what is happening here is anything but mundane.

The first sign is that we're up a mountain.

Mountains in the Bible mean something big is about to happen. Do you remember Mount Sinai? Where having been rescued out of Egypt, God's people officially became God's people, his treasured possession.

The second sign is the fact that Jesus didn't appoint 6 or 10 or 15, but 12. Just like God had divided Israel up into 12 tribes.

What's happening here is no less than the beginning of the new people of God.

Jesus is establishing his church. His church that we are still part of today.

Whether we're meeting on Zoom or in the building this morning, we are the church that Jesus established on a mountainside in Galilee over 2000 years ago.

God's treasured possession, who Paul describes in his letter to the Ephesians as

Eph 2:20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone.

Jesus is establishing his church through which he will continue to **captivate crowds** and expand his kingdom long after the plot to kill him plays out.

The risen and ascended Lord Jesus is still building on this foundation today, all around the world.

And if we want to know where we fit in, we need to first look at our foundation.

3:14 He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.

Our founding members were called first to **be with Jesus**.

As disciples of Jesus, we too are to learn from him, hear his encouragement and his challenge. We are to be cared for by him and led by him.

And for all that to happen we first and foremost need to be listening to him as he speaks to us through God's Word and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Here is where we meet Jesus and spend time with him. Here is where we hear his words of comfort and instruction, of warning and encouragement.

Secondly, our founding members were **sent out by Jesus**.

Sent to preach the good news of his kingdom, and to have the authority to drive out demons.

God's kingdom expands as people hear the gospel, turn from their sin and are restored to relationship with their Maker, and as good triumphs over evil.

As disciples of Jesus we too are **sent out by him** to advance his kingdom in word and action.

We might not all be preachers, but we are all to speak about Jesus and his gospel, otherwise, as J C Ryle who commented on these verses puts it we are about as useful as

"a lampless lighthouse ... or a painted fire."

We're sent to speak and we're sent to act, to live - for Jesus and against evil. We might not all be called to drive out demons, but to quote J C Ryle again,

"whatever be the direction in which the devil is most busy, there ought we to be, ready to confront and withstand him."

You might be asking, but what can I possibly do? Well, just asking that question out loud to a fellow disciple would be a great place to start.

And if you feel like a failure then have a look down this list of our founding members and take heart.

Peter the denier heads them up. Thomas the doubter is there in the middle. There's no trying to hide Judas the betrayer there at the end. And half of these names are never mentioned in the bible again. Nobodies.

We don't stand on the shoulders of giants, we stand on the shoulders of ordinary flawed disciples just like us.

And so when we look in the mirror and look around us and feel weak and ready to crumble, we need to remember that it has always been like this.

God chose the weak things of this world... the nobodies, the deniers, the doubters and even the betrayers to expand his kingdom through.

It's not about us ultimately. Jesus is the one who captivates the crowds. Jesus is the one who establishes his church. Jesus is our chief cornerstone and our builder. And that should give us all the confidence in the world.

Jesus is fully in control, his kingdom will keep coming, there is no mute button for the gospel.

The question for us is, how are we going to be part of turning up the volume?