

## “Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

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February 5, 2006  
Text: Mark 1:29-39

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Do you know mirrors have been around for centuries? The Greeks and Romans had mirrors of polished bronze. In medieval times “mirror” meant a polished metal plate which was held in the hand. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century mirrors of polished steel, sometimes convex, were hung on the wall. Mirrors were also made of crystal – not until the 16<sup>th</sup> century were the Venetian glassmakers able to make glass sufficiently clear, that when backed with foil it produced a true image. A glass mirror was a novelty, and at once became a “looking glass” to distinguish it from the already metal mirror.

I get a kick out of playing with two mirrors in clothing stores and barbershops, in which you can see an endless line of images. We use mirrors constantly – at home, at work, and when we drive; mirrors are even used in space. The mirror figures prominently in the fairy tale of Snow White. Remember Snow White’s stepmother – the evil queen? Day after day, she confidently stepped before the magic mirror to ask, “Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?” Or in a more modern version, “Mirror, mirror on the shelf, who’s more beautiful than oneself?” And every morning that mirror agreed with the fair but nasty queen that the image reflected upon it was in fact the most beautiful in the kingdom.

But then one fateful morning, the queen got the shock of her life. Instead of its usual response of, “You are, my queen,” the mirror on this occasion replied, “Snow White.” The queen’s image hadn’t changed, but the mirror’s reflected perception of her had. The truthful but tasteless mirror found someone more beautiful to reflect, and so it now called the queen “Second best.”

How many of us enjoy rushing to the mirror first thing in the morning? Sometimes a night of sleep can turn our million dollar faces into \$1.29 images. Even though mirrors usually show us a version of ourselves that we’d rather not see, most of us find it difficult to pass by a mirror or reflective frame of glass without at least giving a glance.

Like the wicked queen, we are drawn to our mirrors. We often become mesmerized by what they say to us and about us. Most, if not all of us, have talking mirrors. Unfortunately, what we think we hear our mirrors telling us is far from us being the fairest of them all. Instead, we hear a thousand judging voices, voices from our early childhood, then adolescence, and adulthood telling us we are fat and frumpy and failures. Many of us are still looking in childhood mirrors or adolescent mirrors or adult mirrors or a hall of mirrors.

The child in each of us looks in a mirror: “Look at you!” “You’re ears stick out.” “You’re too shy.” “You’re no leader.” The teenage in each of us looks in a mirror: “Forget you!” “No one is going to love you with that skin or hair.” The adult in each of us looks in a mirror: “Wait until they catch on to you!” “You’re not worthy of respect.” “You’re a failure.” Talking mirrors may say to us: “Look at you! You’re too old – you’ve passed your prime.” “You’ve outlived your usefulness.” “You have nothing left to contribute to your family, your church, or your community.”

Talking mirrors are like real mirrors in that they don’t tell the whole story. In a book entitled *It’s All Done With Mirrors*, a scientist says, “It’s often said that mirrors don’t lie. That statement is far from the truth. In fact, mirrors do lie. They tell half-truths, distort, invert, pervert, twist images around into odd shapes, and exaggerate or shrink them.” Mirrors – real ones, talking ones – lie to us, they lie to us just as mirrors real and talking lied to the people in Jesus’ day.

In the gospel of Mark, as we discussed two weeks ago, Jesus is the exorcist. And Jesus is also the healer. While some of the healings Jesus effected were for truly physical maladies – fevers, blindness, crippled limbs, deafness, bleeding – a great many of Jesus’ healings were spiritual sicknesses; thus the exorcisms. One of the most telling symptoms of these spiritual diseases was the cruel things the interior demons forced their human hosts to say and do to themselves. As Mark tells us in today’s text, the cure Jesus effected was not just exorcising these spirits – it was shutting them up!

To begin, Mark clearly sets this scene as distant and distinct from the incidents that had occurred at the Capernaum synagogue. Jesus left the synagogue and all its conflicts behind and entered a private home. Early Christian tradition likes to claim that Peter’s special place in Jesus’ heart stemmed in part from the

situation described in this passage. The tradition maintains that Jesus actually lived in Peter's house, with Peter's family, for some time – drawing Him closer to this disciple than any of His other companions. Whether or not this home visit was for any duration, Mark does paint a cozy picture of this gathering place, carefully including all of Jesus' new disciples.

As a healing story, the encounter described in these verses is hardly dramatic. Simon's mother-in-law is on her bed, suffering from a fever, when all these houseguests arrive. Yet there's no indication that her condition is grave or life-threatening. On the contrary, given the circumstances, the woman's fever is more of an awkward inconvenience than anything else. After all, how can the woman of the house be incapacitated when four hungry men have just walked in the door?

Perhaps Jesus can be credited with an act of compassionate healing anyway. Given the cultural standards of her day, Simon's mother-in-law, unless she was practically dying, would have obediently risen from her bed and served the men in the house regardless of her fever. Jesus' concern causes Him to extend His hand and all the healing power it holds, so that this woman might perform her duties in health and comfort and with joy. She is not simply the woman who serves them – she is an honored member of the household Jesus and His disciples have temporarily joined. Now based on Mark's assertion that Jesus' fame spread everywhere, the quiet, domestic scene at Simon's house is soon transformed by a throng of people seeking Jesus' healing touch. Mark subtly asserts that these were obedient law-abiding, Torah-loving people. Because they would never petition Jesus to perform healing acts during the Sabbath, they have patiently waited until after sundown, the official end of the Sabbath, to make the journey to Simon's house. Jesus performs both healings and exorcisms on Simon's doorstep – having already demonstrated in the possessed man in Capernaum and with Simon's mother-in-law that both these signs of authority are a part of His ministry.

Not only does Jesus have the power to cast out demons, His authority is such that He can forbid these demons to speak out. Jesus Christ, then, healed people physically and spiritually. The touch of Jesus Christ released them from what they thought they were as they looked into a mirror, or as they listened to their own talking mirrors.

What about the healing touch of Christ today, in our time? Steve Galipeau in his book *Transforming Body and Soul* says that much is happening today in psychological and spiritual healing, but very little of it is going on in the church. He writes:

The church has been reduced to a ministry of visiting the sick instead of one of healing the sick and understanding the meaning of illness. Certainly when people are sick at home and in the hospital, it is good to visit and encourage them to get well. But if God is speaking to that person through the illness, then what about helping the person find the voice of God and discover a dimension of healing beyond mere medical restoration? At present the church leaves most of its healing work in the hands of other professionals, especially with physical illness. Yet, the healing tradition of Jesus is almost as old as medicine itself.

. . . The gospel ministry of healing would seem to be crucial if the church is to maintain its proper place in our society. Considering the call of Jesus to heal, the church should be a leader, not a follower, in this area.

As Jesus' healing hands in the world today, it is the role of the church to heal people from the damage their old mirror-images keep inflicting upon them. The church must urge all men and women to break their mesmerizing paralyzing eye-contact they keep making with all the old lies in their lives. The church – us – we must help people polish their mirrors until they see themselves as God sees them.

Have you ever seen the movie *Man of La Mancha*? It stars Peter O'Toole as Miguel de Cervantes and the character he brings to life – Don Quixote. You may recall from seeing the movie or play or reading the story, Aldonza sees herself as a prostitute deserving of no one's genuine love or concern. Don Quixote sees in her not the prostitute Aldonza but Dulcinea. In the play he sings to her "Dulcinea, I see heaven when I see thee Dulcinea." She responds, "You have shown me the sky, but what good is the sky to a creature who'll never do better than crawl?" By the end of the story, the unshakeable faith of Don Quixote ultimately allows this woman to look in her mirror and see not Aldonza, but Dulcinea – she is now the woman she never could have imagined herself to be – the woman God intended her to be.

Some of us live in a tawdry carnival's Hall of Mirrors. We have believed that their grotesque reflections are reality. What is it that stares back at us when we look at ourselves? What reflection stays with us after we turn away from the mirror? What talking mirror needs to be silenced? To what internal voice do we want to say "Shut up!" The voice that tells us we're a failure, or that we're undeserving of God's love or the voice that tells us our faith is not strong enough to allow us to talk to someone else, to share that faith to someone.

When I was growing up, I was not allowed to tell someone to "shut up!" But I think we can make an exception today, because I think most of us would dearly love to invoke the name and power of Jesus Christ and say shut up! to some thought, or behavior, or attitude that keeps nagging us. Where do we long for the healing touch of Christ in our lives today, right now?

One of our congregation's core values is that we are a place for healing and comfort. In our healing ministry to others as the church, Christians are called to re-silver, polish, and straighten the mirrors of our brothers and sisters. Can we help others see what Christ would see in them and what God would do with all of us once our vision has cleared?

Instead of believing in the lies of all those talking mirrors, let us hear the boast of the apostle Paul who declared that in Christ we are a new creation; "the old has passed away, behold, everything has become new."