

## Sermon for Feb. 7, 2021

### Gospel Reading: Mark 1:29–39

**29** And immediately he<sup>[a]</sup> left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. **30** Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. **31** And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

**32** That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. **33** And the whole city was gathered together at the door. **34** And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

**35** And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. **36** And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, **37** and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." **38** And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." **39** And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

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Last week when I sat down to write the sermon, the words came relatively easy.

Jesus was teaching in the Synagogue at Capernaum, to an audience who were eager to listen to his words. The things he was saying to them impressed them in a way that no other preacher had impressed them. This reception that Jesus received, was unfortunately interrupted by an ill-timed confrontation with a demon possessed man. This demon was exposing Jesus' "secret" identity by announcing to everyone present that this Jesus fellow was in fact the Son of God, who had come to destroy the present devils. Jesus reacts quickly to close his mouth and cast him out. Thus exposing his true identity to those who were quick enough to understand what was happening. And the effect was to cause Jesus' fame to grow... which I suppose most people would say so what's wrong with that? What was really going on here anyway? That's a good question to ask of the text... WELL! Let me tell you... I have thoughts on this...And so, as sermons go, I had it easy, because the starting place wasn't all that hard to locate. Where to begin is often my greatest challenge.

You might think it would be where to END... And sometimes that is true. BUT the truth is as simple as this...If we begin and end with Jesus, especially if we can END

with Jesus, most of the time we will serve the goal of the preaching task. "Sir... We would see Jesus."

As I sat down with our lesson this week, I found the task much more challenging because I wasn't arriving at any of the obvious questions.

After exiting the synagogue, Jesus is welcomed into Peter's home along with some of the other disciples. Well, perhaps it's Peter's house. Perhaps it belongs to his mother-in-law. Let's call it the family home. And she, that is Peter's mother-in-law, is quite ill and suffering in bed. Jesus comes and raises her out of her sickness. Her recovery is complete and immediate and she, in turn, serves everybody.

I get the impression she is grateful and glad to do this good work, it seems to be the kind of thing she always did, just the kind of person she was, but her incentive was also the result of being healed.

If we ended the reading there I might be tempted to focus on how Jesus heals us through the forgiveness of our sins, and that our natural work -- and glad and grateful response to that generous healing-- is our willing service in the kingdom.

That message could play... But I keep hearing Hawk-eye Pierce from M\*A\*S\*H saying to Frank Burns, "There is no need to state the INCREDIBLY obvious; when the merely obvious will do."

Our grateful response to God's grace seems like it should be pretty obvious. But you never know...

Still, the text continues, telling us that Jesus spent many hours that night healing many people. There seems to have been a continual line out the door. Good thing Peter's mother-in-law was back in the game, because it was going into extra innings.

One possible answer for this might have been that, since the sun had set, the Sabbath restrictions were over, and people could do "WORK." You might recall that there will be a bone of contention with Jesus, doing "work" when he is healing people on the Sabbath day.

The text in my opinion paints a picture of Jesus suffering through an exhausting day.

That's why it is these verses that are speaking most to ME this week. And possibly, for a similar reason, they might also be speaking to you...

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."

The question I had after reading this was to ask myself WHY? Why are these verses striking a chord with me? What am I hearing here that is speaking to my heart with a message that I can then share with you? A message that I hope ultimately will draw us both into a closer relationship with JESUS?

In Mark's Gospel, the writer is driving home the point that it is DARK when Jesus departs for a quiet place. And when he refers to it as desolate on top of that, it seems to be saying Jesus had had enough of PEOPLE for a little while. That he was intentionally seeking solitude.

Jesus is fully God and God is all-powerful. Jesus is also fully human, and a human being gets tired and irritable. That's simply the truth. It's not a sin. Human beings have limitations. And I think we can point to this and say definitively that Jesus needed to remove himself from the situation and seek a quiet place to commune and pray.

We all need a little sanctuary. We all need a time of peace and quiet, AWAY from the burdens and demands of leadership or even servanthood. It's good and it's necessary.

Jesus doesn't ask permission or even inform his disciples. In fact they have no idea what even happened to him or where he went. I wonder if there is a metaphor in the description of Peter earnestly seeking him. And the message that he was not alone in his search, but everyone else was also seeking him. A typical preaching move might be to make something out of that, and encourage our own diligence in seeking after him. But I wonder...Hidden in Peter's words there seems to be a rebuke of Jesus and even a petition to RETURN to Capernaum and continue his work there. It's almost as if Peter is tempting Jesus to remain in place...

Capernaum is Peter's home base. He is familiar with it. And I've been to Capernaum on the north shores of Lake Gennesaret, right at the mouth of the Jordan river at the base of these low hills. it's beautiful. I'd stay there.

But Jesus is not going to be tempted. It's time to leave. "This is why I've come down" from heaven to earth, he says. There are more towns, and more people, and more work and the time is growing short.

So now you have heard the story, what parts of it are speaking to you? What are the questions you have of the text?

The thing with reading the Bible is that our teacher is both present and absent.

When you read a regular book, the author is not usually sitting there with you, able to answer your questions directly. *What does this mean?* Most of the time you will need to answer the questions yourselves. THIS is what I think the author is saying to me... But when we read the Bible, in faith, the Holy Spirit helps us. We are also able to pray.

And so the answers will be found in two ways...

1. God can speak to our hearts and minds. This is not always trustworthy because it's often difficult to know if it is the SPIRIT or our own selfish desires answering back.
2. The Word of God itself IS our source. We have God speaking to us directly in the words written to us in the Bible. And we understand the difficult passages of Scripture in the light of the clear words of God. "I love you" "I forgive you" "faith is my gift to you" "You are saved not by your works but by your faith"

So you may ask the story questions like this...Where am I in this story? Where is Jesus *or* Who is Jesus in this story. And what is Jesus saying to me?

The lesson I am taking away is this one...

There is a lot of work to do. And we are called to do it. We are made *able* to do this work and we serve *best* when we serve *gladly* with a grateful heart.

There are also limitations to what we can accomplish as individual human beings and sometimes the work and the situations can overwhelm us. So not only are we ALLOWED to remove ourselves from the work and responsibilities for a time, but we also are *encouraged* to seek peace and solitude in prayer with God our Father.

And we can do this, because we have been made one with God through Christ.