

A Reading from the Gospel of Mark - Jane

Mark 1: 29-39

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured 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. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

After last week's demonstration in the synagogue, after Jesus commanded the heckler's "unclean spirit" to leave, after the people were yet again "amazed" at what this man Jesus could do, our text for today delivers more of the same.

In the span of one short day, a pattern of "needing and meeting needs" has developed.

Hoping to have a nice meal and a little break from his day's labor, Jesus (with James and John) heads to his friend Simon Peter's house only to find that Simon's mother-in-law is bedridden with a fever, waiting to be healed, herself. Jesus makes easy work of this healing; after he takes her by the hand and lifts her up, she feels well enough to "serve" them – presumably, she cooks dinner for everyone. (In another sermon we'll talk about the significance of this woman's place and action in the story).

Then later, just when they're probably looking forward to some lazy conversation and maybe another cup of wine, they step outside to find word of the synagogue events has spread, and there's a long line of folk in need (plus an audience of *their* relatives and friends), silently waiting for Sabbath to end so Jesus can heal them!

Patiently, Jesus goes back into his public persona, healing the sick and casting out demons for the good people of Capernaum. It sounds like he worked well into the night, getting little rest afterward, because "in the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went to a deserted place, and there he prayed."

After a long, productive, intense day (with wisdom most of us can only dream of) Jesus walked away, and gave himself some downtime with his God. And later when the disciples go looking for him, they find him refreshed, declaring that he's ready to go again to preach and heal throughout Galilee.

We shouldn't be too surprised to find that Jesus needed to separate himself a bit. This is only the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark, the first Gospel written telling Jesus' story, and describing the early times of Jesus' ministry on the road; and we've just been through a whirlwind of a day with him! Think of how this day must have passed, starting with the episode in the synagogue with the heckler. Think of what must have gone through his head as people filed before him late in the evening, looking for help.

He had to have wondered what all this meant – and how it all would fit into what he believed God asked of him in his ministry on earth. And he had to have felt conflicting emotions as the day wore on.

At first, he probably felt confident and capable in the morning as he called the heckler out in the synagogue and then did more healing on his way out of the building. God's power probably flowed through his hands and heart; his intellect felt sharp and keen as he sought out the physical or emotional troubles in the people and found ways to bring them relief.

But at the end of the day, after a Sabbath meal with his friends and after working with a crowd outside Simon Peter's home, he must have become a little weary of the intensity of all the one-on-one encounters and being constantly surrounded by large numbers of people. Maybe he had to slow his pace down as he dealt with each person in need.

Maybe he wasn't quite as confident as he assessed their troubles; maybe some self-doubt slipped into his thoughts...

And when the last soul gratefully went home in a new body or with a lighter heart, perhaps Jesus stood for a moment in silence and wondered how he was ever going to find the strength to do many more days like this one.

Perhaps Jesus, the very human being, felt overwhelmed, exhausted and afraid that he wasn't enough, that he wouldn't be effective as "The Son of God."

At this moment, he might have sought out one of the disciples, but remember this is very early in the ministry, and he'd only recently called them to be part of the band of the faithful. He probably didn't know any of them that well, and if these were the thoughts that ran through his mind, it may have done more damage than good to express them to his newfound helpers.

So he took a walk in the dark.

And he went to a deserted place.

And he prayed to Abba – his Father and God.

Because the Gospel of Mark was written to remind new Christians just who Jesus was and how important his role was in getting the word out about God, any hint of weakness hasn't been included in the telling of his story. We can only guess how Jesus really felt while he prayed to God that night.

But I bet that after the intense day he'd just been through, he prayed for God's strength and wisdom so he could get up the next morning and start it all over again.

And I bet he said the same prayer upon rising every day until he died because he knew the power to do God's good work didn't come from his own resources – they came from the Single Source – and in his downtime, anytime, he needed to be recharged.

Well, we're quite used to hearing and telling the stories about the Jesus who is powerful and capable and able to stand his ground against Roman soldiers and Pharisees.

But I really appreciate and can identify with a Jesus who also had moments of doubt and insecurity that I've known myself, and I'm pretty sure you all can say the same thing.

This Jesus is like us, and we need to know him, too.

For if we allow our imaginations to fill in some blanks that have been left out in Mark's telling of the story of Jesus' ministry, we can say with confidence that the Jesus who lives in our hearts was not only the amazing Son of God who was sinless and did miracles and knew everything.

Jesus, also, was as real as we are, and regularly, he needed the same kind of help from God that we do.

Sometimes, like the real Jesus, we need downtime to get away from our busy, technology-filled lives and the people in them, and find that dark, quiet, deserted place in the world - or in our own heads - to talk to God alone.

Sometimes, like the real Jesus, once we find that place, we need to ask to be recharged, and plug into God's power, renewing our belief that the work we do in God's name is worthy and necessary - and done well, if done with God's Love.

And sometimes, like the real Jesus, after we've given God the chance to build us back up, we will find we're ready to take the world on again.

Let's serve God.

Let's care for ourselves, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

And when we need to, let's take some downtime and walk away to a place where God can truly find us; and once found, let's hear God's Word in our hearts and find new strength to start all over again.

Amen.