

"Get Away and Pray"

Mark 1:29-39
5th Sunday After the Epiphany

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"And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he (Jesus) 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" (Mark 1:35-37).

I guess at first glance, this section of our Gospel reading from Mark is pretty straight-forward and easy to understand. Jesus got up really early. He went to a place where he could be alone. And he when he got to that place, he prayed. He was eventually found by Simon Peter and his crew who promptly remind Jesus that "everyone is looking for him." This probably didn't surprise Jesus. After all, he had just wrapped up his first day in the public ministry and what a day it was! First, as we heard about last week, he cast out the unclean spirit of a man in the synagogue. Then, as our reading in Mark picks up today, Jesus left the synagogue and went to Simon and Andrew's house where he healed Simon's mother-in-law of a fever. And then that evening he continued healing "all who were sick or oppressed by demons." The text says that "the whole city was gathered at the door." What a day this must have been.

So it's no wonder Peter and the others, after finding Jesus, tell him that everyone is looking for him. After one day on the job, Jesus was in demand. He was a popular guy and rightly so. I mean, if you were sick or injured or possessed and heard of a guy who could heal you on the spot, wouldn't you want to meet him? Sure you would and he wanted to meet them too but Jesus knew how to prioritize his time. And most importantly, Jesus understood the importance of spending time in fellowship with his father. No matter the demands on his time, he knew how and when to get away, even if it was only for a few minutes, and spend time in prayer.

Do you know how and when to do the same? I know I struggle with this way more than I should. There is just so much to do! I am a Pastor. I am a father to five wonderful kids. I am a husband to Lisa. I am the dog walker and guinea pig cage cleaner. People, along with a few animals, need me. I am a popular guy. In fact, most of the time I feel like "everyone is looking for me-" so much so that I often feel I don't have time to get away and spend time in prayer. Do you ever feel that way? I'm sure that you do.

Whether you are church worker, a factory worker, a teacher, an executive, a student or a stay-at-home parent, I know you feel the pressure and a lot of times even the burden that "everyone is looking for you." The reality of life is that there is a demand on our time- there's a lot we need to do each day. Couple that with all the stuff we don't necessarily need to do but like to do and before we know it the day is over. We lay down exhausted, many times not really praying at all, only to wake up and start the process all over again! Sadly, for so many of us, that's our reality isn't it? But Christ reminds us today that there has to be more. His actions the morning after his tremendous first day on the job, remind us that the reality of being a child of God, no matter how much we have to do; no matter how important our positions in life are; is that we spend time with God our Father in prayer.

Maybe that's exactly what you do. Perhaps you follow Jesus' example of not letting the daily demands on your time take precedence over spending time with God in prayer. And maybe it's not. Perhaps prayer confuses or frustrates you so much that you even question its importance. "God knows what's on my mind; he knows what's in my heart; he knows what I need. So why pray?" If that sounds like you, you're not alone. Christian prayer, I think, is not as simple as we seem to make it.

The truth is God does know what's on our minds. He knows what's in our hearts. He knows what we need and why we need it. He certainly doesn't need our prayers. Trust me, he know all of our information. It's not as if he's like, "wow, I never knew John or Carol was going through *that*.. I mean I knew they were struggling but that was some

juicy stuff they just shared with me." He knows it all- he doesn't need our information or our affirmation. So why do we pray?

I think it comes down to this. God has a desire for intimacy with those whom he not only created but those he redeemed. Even in our sinfulness, God seeks us out. Why? Because he likes us. More importantly, he loves us. And if you question that love, even for a second, let me remind you of something. He loves us so much that on Good Friday, in the form of a man, he made one final trip to a desolate place to pray but this place and this prayer was like no other. The place was a rugged cross on a hill outside of town and the prayer was a desperate plea- "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). God heard that prayer but he ignored it. He ignored it because the penalty for sin is death. But instead of your death or my death or the death of any of the faithful before us or those who come after us, God loved us so much that he died in our place. And because Jesus died as the ultimate and final sacrifice for all sins, we never have to pray asking God why he has forsaken us because he never will. Now, our relationship with our heavenly Father is really good. In fact it's more than good; it's perfect. And he wants us, his redeemed children, to share the thoughts of our lives with him. He wants to hear our fears, our joys, our doubts, our praises, and our repentance. He wants us to talk with him on the most intimate level, not as an attempt to impress or to get a little closer to him- we can't get any closer than perfect- but as a response to the gift of life we have been given through our faith in our Savior, Jesus Christ. Prayer, then, for the Christian, should be the place where we can freely take what is most important in our lives and set it before God.

So I ask you this morning, what at the moment, is most important in your life? What is it that you need to share with God? Is it a fear? Is it a joy? Is it confusion, concern, or even anxiety about yourself or a family member? Is it the fact that "everyone is looking for you" and you feel you have too many demands on your time? Or is it the fact that you don't have a lot of friends or family members or even acquaintances. Maybe you feel as though no one is looking for you and it's the loneliness that's most important. Whatever it is, bring it to God your Father in prayer. Share with him and know that

because of his love, proven once and for all by the resurrection of Jesus, that he responds. That response might not be in your timeframe or exactly how you wanted things to work out but remember that he knows our needs better than we do and in time those needs will be revealed.

So maybe this short, seemingly simple passage from Mark is just the word of God we need to hear today to remind us of the importance of Christian daily prayer. Jesus shows us how significant his prayer time with his Father was. He was very intentional about it. And the same should be true for you and me. Do we have to go to some desolate or isolated place in order to pray? No, but we do need to get away from the normal distractions of the day and attempt to quiet our minds, even if it's just for a couple of minutes. That could be in the solitude of the daily commute to work or school. Instead of listening to the news, share the news of your life with God. Maybe it's getting to your destination, wherever that may be, just a little earlier and instead of checking *Instagram* or *Twitter* or email, you go to your Bible App and pray one of the Psalms. Maybe it's while you walk the dog or even take a shower. It doesn't matter when or where it is. The point is to simply make some time where you can intentionally share with GOD each day what's most important.

He'll take the sweet and the sentimental. He'll listen to the wonderfully crafted sentences praising him and all his glory. But he'll also listen to the raw words of worry, fear, guilt, and even disgust we all experience living in this mixed up world- those words that don't sound much like prayer at all. He promises to listen because prayer is first and foremost a response to the grace we have been given in Jesus Christ. We are God's redeemed children are we not? That is our Christian identity and that identity is to be trusted and embraced! So what are we waiting for? We've got nothing to be afraid of. We've got nothing to hide. Let's follow the example of Jesus and get away, if only in our minds, and pray. **Amen.**

