

Sermon for 2-7-21 by Pastor Hanberry "Jesus praying in the dark"
Isaiah 40:21-31 and Mk 1:29-39 (Ser21-6)

Jesus starts out his public ministry changing lives...BEING THE LIGHT IN THE DARK PLACES OF PEOPLE'S LIVES. People like Andrew, James and Simon have spent their lives fishing. Now they are following Jesus and fishing for others to follow him too. They have changed their careers; moved to do something different, something for Jesus. People who had been tormented by demons are changed. The demons are told in no uncertain terms to move on; to leave the people in which they had been living.

Other prophets had come before but none had done such awesome healings and cleansings as Jesus is doing in these beginning days of his ministry. Things are changing. Tradition was that any such healing work was never done on the Sabbath. But Jesus comes to break with tradition.

On the Sabbath he and four of his new disciples GO to the house of Simon's mother-in-law for a visit. She's sick with a fever, and what does Jesus do? In the private of this home, Jesus "simply takes her by the hand and lifts her up, and the fever leaves her." And the result is that she moves from the sick bed to the kitchen to the dining room where she serves her guests. I guess you could say, "Jesus helps her, and then she goes about helping the others. Nothing dramatic, just a quiet moment of moving on with her life.

As an aside, no, not an aside, as a central point or event in Mark's story for today, what does Jesus do, indeed, where does Jesus go in the midst of all this change? "In the morning, while it is still very dark, he gets up and goes out to a deserted place, and there he prays." Interesting that Jesus seeks the dark for his prayer time. But his quiet prayer time doesn't last very long. Mark goes on to say, "And Simon and his companions hunt for him. When they find him, they say to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.'"

"Everyone is searching for you." Can you see this? People in the towns and along the roads and in the markets, asking about this one who is showing the people how to move on with their lives, how to bring change that brings them healing and hope. Searching for this one who starts his day in prayer in the dark.

An interesting question to ask of this text today about the spread of Jesus' way is this: How does Jesus respond to the huge demand for his healing ministry? What causes his ministry to take off, to spread so rapidly? What inspired the people to search for this man called Jesus?

Let me suggest these two: **FAITH and PRAYER.**

One writer says, **“it is faith that lifts us up, and it is prayer that keeps us going.”** What happened at the house of Simon’s mother-in-law may have been the tipping point. Jesus lifted her up from her illness, from her dark moment and she was restored to health, and everyone who heard about this healing wanted some for themselves.

Isaiah says, *“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord does not faint or grow weary...even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, and they shall mount up like eagles...”* What is this if not faith?

Faith? What does Jesus tell many if not most of the people who are healed? “Go, move on, your faith has made you whole. Faith changes us, moves us to where the Lord wants us to be. I read of an old poem about a stone cutter that underlines this notion that it is faith that strengthens the stonecutter, “who knows that is not the 100th blow that splits the rock but all 99 that went before.

What is going to be the tipping point in your life that will bring the change you need to move on with your life? Is it going to be the faith of disciples who reach out and take the hand of Jesus and begin a new adventure in your life? Is the faith of Simon’s mother-in-law who just gets up with a lifting and helping hand of another? What will it take for your faith to gets it edge back again?

We all know someone—maybe more than one person--who is depressed, some who can’t or won’t even get out of bed. People lose their spiritual edge, their motivation to get up and do what needs to be done. Preferring the dark places of our rooms.

This calls for prayer. Yes, prayer is the second thing that can bring us to the tipping point in our lives. It is true even for Jesus. Where was he early that morning after his healing encounter at Simon’s mother-in-law’s house? Yes, in a quiet place in prayer. If it was prayer that kept Jesus going, why wouldn’t we want it be a daily part of our lives? What do you imagine the new disciples were thinking about having to hunt for Jesus and then finding him alone praying? Indeed, what do you think about this scene in this story?

“Everyone is searching for you.” Everyone wants a piece of you. Everyone needs something from you. No, I can’t respond to that now. I need to pray. I must be in a solitary place, early in the morning. Someone

says that Jesus' prayer ritual included three things: "getting up early "while it was still dark," leaving the house and then finding a solitary place.

What do some of us normally do each morning? Get out of bed and leave our homes and go off to the activities of our lives. There was a time before too many ailments and knee surgeries, etc. when I could rise each morning while it was still dark and leave the house and go out for a run and see the sunrise as I return home. And you know what, the energy that comes with early morning exercise ritual used to tip me toward a day of work and interesting people. But it's those mornings when my run would turn into a prayer, it's the morning when I come to a quiet place that I create as an altar rail for prayer that I am really energized for the day.

Let's face it, many of us may get up early but we don't leave our homes...Rather, we continue to isolate/quarantine staying safe from the Covid Virus. Weather you leave your house or stay put; do you find a solitary place to pray? If you do you will find strength for the day. You will then be able to move on with what you are being called to be and do that day. You will find how amazing it is that a small quiet solitary act will outwit the overwhelming obstacles of the day. You will be amazed at the way your faith and your prayers will tip you toward the unexpected.

Amen.