

He Prayed — Rev. Denise Stone

Text: Mark 1:29-39

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Last Sunday we accompanied Jesus and some of his disciples to the Synagogue in Capernaum and witnessed Jesus' divine authority in his teaching and casting out of a demon.

Today we are continuing Jesus' day in Capernaum. We will see Jesus' priorities and hopefully will find priorities for ourselves.

The Second Scripture Reading for today is from the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 1, verses 29-39:

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹ He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³² That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³ And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴ 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.

³⁵ In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and his companions hunted for

him. ³⁷ When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” ³⁸ 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.” ³⁹ And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.ⁱ

The Word of the Lord, **Thanks Be to God**

If we include last week’s passage, the time Jesus spent in Capernaum over this one day is packed with activity. I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that events in the Gospel of Mark happen at a rapid pace. This day in Capernaum certainly seems jam packed.

Looking at the whole day, the text could be organized like this:

Jesus in Capernaum	1:21-39
Exorcism in the Synagogue	21-28
Healing Simon’s Mother-in-law	29-31
The sick healed at evening	32-34
Departure to a lonely place	35-38
Summary: preaching in Galilee	39 ⁱⁱ

The first two scenes are miracle stories. We looked at the exorcism in the synagogue last week – learning how even Jesus’ miracle was part of his teaching/preaching.

We could spend whole sermons just on the healing stories of the next two scenes.

Today, however, I want us to focus on the next scene in today's text: Jesus' "Departure to a Lonely Place," in verses 35-38. Look first at verse 35.

³⁵ In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

All of this activity happening in chapter 1 of Mark, and here we find that Jesus got up early, even while it was still dark, and he went to a deserted place to pray. The word for deserted here is the same word used earlier in Mark for where John the Baptist was near the Jordan River and again where Jesus was tempted by Satan.

Jesus withdraws to a place where he can be alone and spend time with God the Creator – his Father.

This is not the only time in Mark (not to mention the other gospels) that Jesus withdraws to pray. We will see this again in Mark chapters 6 and 14.

Lamar Williamson notes in his Commentary on Mark that Jesus "exemplifies in his own life the rhythm of work, rest, and prayer."ⁱⁱⁱ Williamson goes on to say,

In Mark, Jesus prays alone and often, revealing not only his Jewishness... but also his full humanity; in times of stress, temptation, and decision he turns to God for strength and guidance.^{iv}

I have been reminded by other ministers a number of times in the last month or so that we need to take time for rest and prayer. We seem to have the work part down fairly good, but it is the rest and prayer that is easily neglected – because we are so busy doing *things*.

An article in Christianity Today reminded me that,

Technology has made it possible for us to be plugged in from dawn to dusk. Many of us are now working at home which can equal working literally all hours of the day. If we aren't careful we will find that the constant pull of those unanswered work emails, that newsfeed to scroll, and the million other tiny things we feel that we *have* to accomplish in a day can steal away our peace.^v

Looking at the life of Jesus and the teachings we read from Paul, it is evident that work *is* important. We *are* called to certain tasks and we should do them diligently, giving our best efforts. Work, however, is only a portion of our lives.

As we continue looking at the next couple of verses, we see that the disciples seem to miss the point. We are not so different from the disciples.

Starting again at verse 35,

³⁵ In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and his companions hunted for

him. ³⁷ When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” ³⁸ 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.”

Jesus made his time with God a priority. He left the disciples early in the morning so that he could be alone to pray. The disciples came looking for Jesus because the people were looking for Jesus.

Why?

My guess is that the people wanted more miracles, wanted more time with this man who teaches with authority. The disciples were thinking this right along with the other people.

The disciples did not understand what Jesus was doing.

Jesus made taking time to pray a priority.

Jesus, God Incarnate, needed time to rest and to pray.

If Jesus needed time to rest and to pray, what does that teach us?

We need time to rest and to pray.

Back in 1988, Bill Hybels wrote a book entitled, “Too Busy Not to Pray.”

I often think of that title when I find I'm too busy. Or when I'm not too busy, but still haven't taken the time to rest, time to pray.

Do you have those times?

Jesus made taking time to spend with God a priority. It was essential for him to be able to continue to preach and to heal.

It was essential for *Jesus* to take time with God in order to continue his ministry.

The crowds of people and the disciples were constantly making demands of Jesus. *We* live in a world where there are constant demands, whether from external forces or those of our own making. Jesus needed time devoted just to God. *We* need to make time alone with God, time devoted just to God, a priority. This needs to be a priority above and beyond the other demands that we have. We, just like Jesus, cannot continue in our ministry – whatever that ministry may be – without making time to spend with God. It is essential for *our* ministry.

God the Creator took time to rest after creation. Jesus took time to rest and to pray.

How can we expect to do all that God asks of us if we do not also take the time to rest, the time to pray?

I recently saw a cartoon that had the following caption:

A vicar told someone he didn't take a day off, because the devil doesn't. The person replied, "With respect, I think you might want a better role model."^{vi}

As we turn our attention to celebrating Holy Communion, let us choose to follow the better role model.

ⁱ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ⁱⁱ Lamar Williamson, Interpretation. Pg. 55

ⁱⁱⁱ Lamar Williamson, Interpretation. Pg. 56

^{iv} Lamar Williamson, Interpretation. Pg. 56

^v <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/prayer/prayers-to-rest-in-the-lord.html>.

^{vi} <http://www.standrewscanterbury.org/church-assets/feedingfivethousandwalkingonwater.docx>.