

Trinity Baptist Church
Sunday 8th November 2020; Andy Banks
Mark 1:35-39; Jesus' Priorities

We continue our series in Mark, asking ourselves the question Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" And what difference does who he is make to your life? Let's read from Mark 1:35-39. As ever, children, feel free to complete your activities, while I talk.

[Read Mark 1:35-39]

35Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. 36Simon and his companions went to look for him, 37and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'

38Jesus replied, 'Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come.' 39So he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

[Pray]

I wonder, what shapes or dictates your daily schedules and activities? Of course, there are many demands over which we have little or no control. School timetables, hours of work, appointments and meetings, ferrying the children to clubs, etc. But is there also space within that activity for God to speak to you, to surprise you, or to use you? Is there time to stop and support someone in need, or to laugh with your children, or to reflect upon God's blessings? Is your job just a job, or is it an offering of worship to God?

You know, Jesus knew his fair share of pressure to perform. The night before this passage, the whole town was at his door, clamouring for him to heal this disease and perform that exorcism. He was so sought-after that, to have space alone, he had to get up before dawn and go to a deserted place. And even then, the disciples came looking for him to tell him that everyone wanted a piece of him! Yet, in the midst of all this busyness, he remained faithful to three key priorities, which set the agenda for his daily schedule.

- 1) The priority of prayer with God
- 2) The priority for the purposes of God
- 3) The priority to portray God's Kingdom

1) The priority of prayer with God

So first, the priority of prayer with God. The crowds at his door were surely any preachers' dream! Who would want to waste an opportunity like that! But Jesus' priority is very different – his priority is to pray! To spend time alone with his Father God as he starts his day. So, he gets up before dawn to ensure he has time for this first priority activity before the demands on him begin. And the sense is not that this was an *exceptional* event. No, this was simply his regular practice, the *normal* priority of his daily life.

So, I wonder, is prayer with God *your* first priority, or is it squeezed in if and when you have time, or if and when you feel like it? I know I have the enormous privileges of prayer being legitimately part of my work, of working from home, and of organising my own schedule. But it still takes discipline to choose to start my day with prayer. And once upon a time I had a proper job, and before that I was at school and university, and it was in those environments that my prayer discipline was established. When I was teacher training, starting my day with prayer meant getting up at 5 o'clock or earlier. Actually, that wasn't always great for the others in my house,

because I pray and read the Bible verbally. And, although I tried to talk quietly, on one occasion I clearly got carried away, and my housemate wrapped on the door, and said somewhat grumpily, "It's a bit early to be shouting!"

So, don't do that! But I do want to challenge you. Choose a time each day to read your Bible and to pray, and discipline yourself to stick to it! You will find it truly live-giving! "But, Andy, I don't have time!" The truth is we all *make* time for what really matters to us. Jesus clearly saw prayer as essential for *him*. Are we really saying we need to connect with God less than he needed that connection?

2) The priority for the purposes of God

Secondly, Jesus' prayers did more than connect him with his Father God. Prayer also enabled Jesus to hear God's purposes for that day and to follow them, rather than to be controlled by other people's agendas. The crowd were hungry for more of Jesus' miracles. Everyone was looking for him. But what was Jesus' response? "Let us go somewhere *else* – to the nearby villages – so that I can preach there also." Because that was God's direction for this day, and for his overall ministry. That was why Jesus had come! And he learned it and agreed to it in prayer! To borrow a phrase from Rick Warren, Jesus' life was a "Purpose-driven life."

"Yeah, well, it's all very well for Jesus – serving God *was* his only work! I can't just down tools and go around preaching God's Kingdom all the time. I'll get the sack!" ... Well I won't, but you might! But that's not what I'm talking about. I don't believe that Jesus wants to direct our paths in ways that dishonour our employers. But that doesn't mean he can't still use us to further his kingdom. Fiona is a radiographer two days a week. And she works hard – in fact she hates it when there's nothing to do! But it's amazing the number of days she comes home and shares some way in which God opened up a conversation about him during the course of her day – either with a patient or with other members of staff. She doesn't push it, but God makes it happen, anyway. If our priority, like Jesus, is to serve the purposes of God, he will make opportunities for us to do so.

3) The priority to portray God's Kingdom

And, as we delve a little deeper into God's purposes for Jesus' life and ministry, we find a priority for portraying the kingdom of God *throughout* Israel – for *teaching and demonstrating* what the coming near of the kingdom really meant. He wasn't snubbing Capernaum here – even though they later proved themselves quite resistant to his claims to be the Messiah, to his calls for repentance, and to his insistence that the good news was for Gentiles as well as for Jews (e.g. *Matt 8:11-12; 11:23-24*)! It's simply that he'd already preached the kingdom in Capernaum and so many other towns and villages needed to hear this good news too!

Likewise, Jesus refused to be constrained into becoming a miracle worker for the sake of it. His was no magic show. His miracles were intended to portray who he is – God in human flesh, with God's authority over the natural world. And they were intended to demonstrate what the kingdom of God is like – the invasion of light into a dark world, of healing for sickness, of resurrection for death, and freedom from everything that oppresses and binds us in slavery. In other words, Jesus' miracles were not an end in themselves, but a demonstration of the truth of his spoken message: "The time has come, the kingdom of God *has come near*. Repent and believe the good news!"

Jesus never lost sight of this priority for his life and ministry. And we must never lose sight of it either. We must never allow the minutiae of decisions to obscure the big picture. Of course, we must steward our money and our buildings well. But money and buildings are there to serve the *priority* of spreading the kingdom of God. Of

course, we must make wise decisions to protect the health of each other and of the local community at this time. But protecting health is not the primary purpose of the Church; our priority is to spread the kingdom of God – both in words, and with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power! Jesus’ priority, received and reinforced as he prayed with his Father, was and is to grow the kingdom of God. I pray it will never be anything other than *our* first priority as the people of God, too! The question is, what part does God want *you* to play to further that priority this week? Why not ask him to show you in prayer?

[Pray]