

Mark 1, 29-39

13th January 2021

May I speak in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Our gospel reading today begins “As soon as they had left the synagogue” Well, why is that important? Let’s look at the previous paragraph v. 23 “Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit” Did they find him trawling the local brothels? Did they find him a gambling den, squandering his wages while his children went hungry? No, he was “in their synagogue” Their synagogue. This time its personal. Stay with me on this, because this is important. Amongst other things, the unclean spirit says, “I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” Jesus commands the unclean spirit to be quiet and come out, which it does.

That the unclean spirit is in the very synagogue where Jesus worships we may find surprising, but there we have it. All Scripture is God-Breathed (2 Tim 3, 16-17 – in full) We may be so surprised at its presence that we miss the relevance of the unclean spirits words, “I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”

Now, Jesus has gone to the house of Simon & Andrew, Simon’s mother in law has a fever, which may have been malaria, Jesus takes her by the hand and lifts her up, the fever leaves her and she begins to serve them. There are 2 reasons why Mark mentions that she gets up and serves them – one to show that this un-named lady was completely cured and fully recovered, Jesus wasn’t exhausted by healing and delivering people in the synagogue earlier that day, and two, to show the importance of service to others, which for Mark is the supreme Christian activity.

We are told that “At sunset they brought to him all who were sick and ill” sunset being the end of the Sabbath, so this was the first chance the Jews had to carry sick people to Jesus, and in v 33 we read “And the whole city was gathered around the door.”

V 34 “And He cured many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons, he would not permit the demons to speak because they knew Him.” That He cured many and not all shows that Jesus could not physically touch the whole city in a couple of hours. We have no record of Jesus failing to cure anyone who came to Him, the only record we have of Jesus needing two attempts to heal anyone is in Mark 8, 24 when the previously blind man says, “I see men like trees, walking.”

Let’s look at how Jesus handles His prayer life. V35 “In the morning while it was still very dark, he got up/and went out/to a deserted place/ and there He prayed. The morning was still VERY dark, Jesus had not had much sleep, he got up/he went out – these are all deliberate acts of will – He walks to a desolate place, and there is a clue later on in the passage that this may have been a couple of miles away, and there He prayed. That is a lot of determination of Jesus’ part to get alone with the Father. We are told that Simon & his friends “hunted” for Jesus. There was ½ the town gathering round his house, remember, Simon did not leave his house, turn left, then shout “Look, there’s Jesus by that rock!” When they find Jesus, they tell Him, “Everyone is searching for You” there’s a reprimand there, that Jesus should have stayed where they expected him to be. Let’s look at what Jesus doesn’t say – He doesn’t justify His need for prayer, He doesn’t remind them how busy He has been, He neither ignores nor pays attention to the crowd that has waited overnight for His attention, all these things are reasonable, we might even say, responsible things for Jesus to focus His attention on. He is aligned, instead, to God’s greater purpose. He says” Let us go to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do.” Then Jesus travels throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message and casting out demons.

It seems as if Jesus has turned His back on the sick and needy, but not a bit of it. He cares so much about the all the people that He is going to go to the cross for their sake.

Jesus lived in perfect obedience to the Father. God wanted His message spread to all the towns, Jesus leaves those He didn't get to heal in God's capable hands and sets off in obedience throughout Galilee.

There is no denying the sick people Jesus did not get round to healing, went away unhealed. Jesus was in His physical body at this time and this is a demonstration of His human-ness. At that time, He could not do everything.

So, what is this passage saying to us?

We have seen the efforts Jesus made to stay in contact with the Father. His relationship, His prayer life, takes priority over all the important matters in His life. Jesus had routine matters in His life, the same as we do, and we, like Him, have important matters in our lives. Our care for other people/our service to others/our witness to their lives/Jesus puts God first, and following Him, we need to be doing the same. This may lead to us doing the unexpected and holding on to our position when we are not so sure that WE are right, but that God knows the end from the beginning and He knows what is best.

This is a massive ask, and will require the same concentrated deliberation on our part as Jesus gave to our Father in obedience and prayer. Let us notice the selflessness on Jesus' part. We are not told this, specifically, but let us accept that healing the sick was satisfying for Jesus. Full of compassion and doing only what He saw the Father doing, restoring people's physical bodies to Kingdom Health, and delivering the captives from the enemy to usher in the Kingdom of God, must have been a wonderful feeling. I'm sure not everybody was always as grateful as one might expect, and I'm also sure people crowding round Jesus all wanting something from him occasionally became tedious, but only Jesus could heal with a touch, only Jesus would touch lepers, Jesus was fully God and fully man, remember, He must have felt special. He would much rather preach and heal than go to the Cross. That level of obedience was a struggle for Jesus. Rest assured none of us will ever have to face the same decision, but if we

are serious about putting God first in our lives, we are guaranteed times of struggle in obeying Him, as our self-will surrenders to God's will.

We are living in unprecedented times, so many changes in such a short time, it can be scary to acknowledge what is happening and deadly to go into denial, meeting together in large groups, maskless. Our only place of safety is in Christ Jesus. As we stay closer to Jesus and He leads us to the Father, we need to be prepared to listen and obey. It may be that God is telling us to stop doing something we like doing, something that benefits others, something that we only started doing in the first place was because He told us to.....and to start or continue another task He has for us. When we find ourselves in this situation, and we will, we can recall that there is a Biblical precedent for such matters and God is in charge, and we are not called to understand so much as to obey.

God tells us in Isaiah 55, 8 "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways."