

Lent – Prayer: A Daring Dialogue
Jesus - Role Model for Prayer
I Kings 19:8-18, Mark 1: 29-39

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I Kings 19:8-18

And the word of the LORD came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

¹⁰He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

¹¹The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.”

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹²After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

¹³When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

¹⁴He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

¹⁵The LORD said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. ¹⁶Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. ¹⁷Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu.

¹⁸Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”

INTRO

Each of the four Gospels is unique and written for a specific audience. Mark’s gospel, unlike the other three, makes no mention of Jesus origin or birth. Mark begins with the ministry of John the Baptist and quickly proceeds to Jesus’ baptism, his testing/temptation in the wilderness, and the launching of Jesus’ public ministry, which focuses here on healing, casting out demons, and the

calling of the first disciples, Peter and Andrew, James and John. All of this in the first 35 verses of chapter one! Mark is a man on a mission in terms of getting to what he thinks is important for his readers to know.

Mark 1:29-39

²⁹As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

³²That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

³⁵**Very 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 I can preach there also. That is why I have come." ³⁹So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

[PRAY]

Mark gives us a snapshot...a day in the life of Jesus.

It began on the Sabbath. Jesus does what all devout Jews do on the Sabbath. He goes to synagogue. That's where we find Jesus (v.21) and it was there that Jesus began teaching. The people were amazed at the authority with which he taught. He was not the normal, run of the mill rabbi. No! Jesus was clearly different.

I could be wrong, but ordinary rabbis, likely did not have their teaching interrupted by men possessed by unclean spirits, trying to out them as the Holy One of God! Jesus silences and casts out the spirit. The man is freed, and Jesus' fame spreads throughout Galilee.

That brings us up to the portion of chapter 1, we are considering today. After synagogue Jesus and his small entourage, go to the home of Simon Peter where

they discover that his mother in law is ill. Foregoing all bad mother in law jokes, Jesus heals her. She responds by offering hospitality, in gratitude, no doubt.

After sunset, the entire village—which might be an exaggeration or hyperbole, to simply mean “a whole lot of locals”—showed up outside the door to Peter’s house! Jesus was in demand! All the sick and demon possessed got in line for healing.

Put yourself in Jesus’ sandals for a minute. Yes, you are the Son of God. Yes, you have divine abilities to teach with authority as well as to heal and cast out demons. You’ve already put in an eight hour day (or more), and now it’s sunset. You’d like to put your feet up, relax awhile with a glass of wine, and enjoy some quiet conversation. But, no.

They are taking numbers, lining up outside in the front yard. Each person with a legitimate need, honestly seeking healing and wholeness. Each one seeking something from Jesus. And Mark tells us, he healed many of various diseases, which likely included physical, emotional, psychological, mental health issues, in addition to cast out and silencing many “unclean spirits”.

What Mark does not tell us, is this:

At what time did Jesus heal the last person? If he started at sunset, how long did Jesus continue? Why not shut down the healing operation and ask folks to come back the following day? Remember Jesus had already put in a very, very long and demanding day.

Verse 35 tells us that **“Very 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.”**

In other words, Jesus may well have been up all night! If he did sleep, it was likely not the recommended 8 hours!

I can imagine Jesus, padding barefoot through the house in the dark, quietly exiting a rear or side door, not wanting to disturb anyone. He does **not** want to attract attention. He wants to be alone. He seeks a place of solitude.

Why?

Recharge his batteries. Jesus is not the energizer bunny who keeps going and going and going. His humanity is evident in exhaustion. After giving so much of

himself in teaching, in healing, in human interaction, he is completely drained, spiritually, emotionally, physically. He had exerted enormous amounts of power and energy. In a way similar to our cell phones and other electronic devices, his batteries are nearly depleted. He needed to take care of himself in order to carry on his ministry. He needs rest, as we all do.

By retreating to a quiet place of solitude, he could...

Reconnect with his Father. Jesus needed to commune with the Source of all Life, power and healing. In this instance, we do not have a record of what Jesus prayed. We might wonder about that.

A friend was tucking her four year old in to bed one night when her daughter announced to her mom that she wanted to pray. Quietly, they bowed their heads. The girl began praying, her words getting softer and softer, until only her lips were moving. Then she concluded with a loud, "Amen!"

"Honey", her mom said, "I didn't hear a word you said."

"That's okay, Mama," she replied. "I wasn't talking to you."

Jesus wasn't talking to us! Jesus was talking to his Heavenly Father. This was a vital, essential connection for Jesus. He would not have had the power to carry out his ministry, without this. And if this was true for Jesus, how much more true it is for you and me!

By reconnecting with his Father, Jesus will...

Refocus on his mission. It would be easy for Jesus' rapidly growing popularity and his success, to go to his head. In Jesus' humanity, he could Time alone with his heavenly Father served to confirm and clarify Jesus' primary purpose on earth get hooked by the applause, by the accolades, by the desire to please the people, vs. the desire to please his heavenly Father.

Time alone with God served to confirm and clarify Jesus' primary purpose on earth. Jesus came for one reason, and one reason only. Although healing was clearly an important part of his ministry, it was not his first and foremost purpose, as we'll see in a moment.

Imagine the sunrise, the growing golden glow spreading across the morning sky as the sun peeks above the horizon. People are stirring in Peter's house, his mother

in law is putting the coffee pot on. Bedding is rolled up and stored for the day. Soon they realize Jesus is MIA/ Missing in Action! Where could Jesus be?

Mark says that Peter and his companions go searching for Jesus. Implicit in the Greek word used here for searching is an urgency more akin to 'hunting'. They were determined.

And when they find Jesus, they say: "Everyone is looking for you!" (v.37) The implication is "What are you doing out here when there are people to be healed, spirits to be cast out, there are widows and orphans who need help, and..." you get the picture. ***In no time at all, the disciples had an agenda for Jesus!***

Jesus, having had his time in solitude and prayer to Recharge, Reconnect, Refocus, was not swayed by their agenda.

Because of his time in prayer, Jesus was clear about his mission, his purpose, and God's agenda for him.

It may have been quite tempting to stay in Capernaum, where he had been well received, where he had a "successful" healing ministry. You know the saying, "Nothing succeeds like success"? Why move on?

But Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." (v.38)

This may well have been a disappointment to those who wanted Jesus to stay put. Weren't there still people there who needed what Jesus had to offer? No doubt. But Jesus says, time to move on to nearby villages to share the good news. Why? Because that is why he came. **Jesus is clear about his purpose and he will not be side-tracked or distracted.**

If Jesus is our role model for prayer, what are the "takeaways" in this, for you and me?

We live in a very noisy world. How many of us, after getting in our vehicles and putting on our seatbelts, turn on the radio before we turn on the ignition? Restaurants, businesses, and even grocery stores pipe in music—loud, sometimes obnoxious music! That is just the beginning of all the "air pollution" that we

contend with on a daily basis. **How are we to hear God's voice in the midst of it all??**

Just like Jesus, we must find a quiet place!

The OT reading from I Kings about Elijah is instructive in this regard. Elijah is that he was in a desperate situation. He had fled for his life to Mt. Horeb. **He needed to hear from God. God spoke to him**, but it was **not** in the great and powerful **wind**, it was not in the **earthquake**, it was **not** in the **fire**. **God spoke in a gentle whisper!** (I Kings 19:12)

Where is your Mt. Horeb? It could be the kitchen table, or a favorite chair. Whatever the location, **it needs to be a place without distractions.**

How shall we hear God's gentle whisper, if we don't create a quiet place of solitude and commit some time alone with God—each day--in order to listen?

Prayer is a "daring dialogue" –in other words, we don't have to do all the talking...we can and should meditate on scripture...**listening for God's quiet voice to speak to us.** Jesus says he is the Good Shepherd, and the sheep will recognize his voice.

A while ago, one of those annoying ads popped up while I was working on my computer. It was an ad for Microsoft services, but what caught my attention was their slogan: "Manage what Matters".

All of us face competing demands on our time and energy; people and events that "matter"—family, friends, work, worship, volunteering, and self-care such as time for regular exercise, and so on. **All of it "matters"**. All of these are valuable and worthwhile. However we know that we cannot do it all. **How do we prioritize?**

We must make choices. We cannot solve all the problems, address all the needs, either as individuals or as a church. As desperate and complex as some needs are, we realize that we cannot always fix it, heal it or make it better. Even Jesus, in his humanity, experienced these same limitations.

That's where prayer comes in.

As with Jesus, so prayer can be for us:

A time to **Recharge**... to step away from all the demands and recharge our spiritual batteries through mediating on God's Word, and prayer.

Reconnect... with the One who loves us beyond our imaging. To know that we are God's beloved children, saved, forgiven, freed to live and serve our Savior. Powered by the Holy Spirit!

Refocus on God's agenda for us. God has a purpose, a plan, a mission for each of us to fulfill individually as well as corporately.

Refocusing on God's agenda for us confirms our calling, and clarifies our priorities.

More than anything else we do on a daily basis, finding a quiet place to connect with God is the most important thing we can do.

PRAY—Gracious Father, may we follow Jesus' example, and daily, spend time with you to

Recharge

Reconnect

Refocus

Please make us more like Jesus, in whose name we pray, Amen.