

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2021

MARK 1:29-39

**BE STILL AND KNOW**

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PART OF WORSHIP?

IS IT THE CREED WHERE YOU CAN STAND UP AND DECLARE YOUR FAITH?

IS IT THE TIME OF PRAYER WHERE YOU CAN GIVE ALL THOSE THINGS ON YOUR HEART TO GOD?

IS IT THE SINGING WHERE YOU CAN LET GO WITH GUSTO AND PRAISE GOD WITH ALL YOUR VOICE?

SOMEONE ONCE TOLD ME THEIR FAVORITE PART OF WORSHIP WAS BEFORE – DURING THE PRELUDE.

WHEN I ASKED WHAT MADE THE PRELUDE SO MEANINGFUL, HE SAID IT WAS BECAUSE HIS WHOLE WEEK WAS SO FULL, AND SO BUSY, AND SO INTENSE. BUT WHEN HE CAME INTO THE SANCTUARY AND THE PRELUDE BEGAN, IT WAS THE ONLY TIME ALL WEEK WHEN HE COULD JUST SIT BACK, BE QUIET, AND BE WITH GOD.

MOST OF US ARE SIMPLY TOO BUSY TO STOP AND DO NOTHING FOR EVEN A FEW MOMENTS EACH WEEK.

MANY OF US FEEL LIKE WE NEED TO BE ACTIVE EVERY MINUTE OF THE DAY.

WE CONFUSE BUSY-NESS WITH BEING PRODUCTIVE, SUCCESSFUL, EFFICIENT, EFFECTIVE AND MEANINGFUL.

SO IT COMES AS A SURPRISE TO READ OUR NEW TESTAMENT LESSON AND TO FIND JESUS, NOT BEING SO BUSY WITH LIFE. IN FACT, IN THE MIDST OF A VERY BUSY TIME IN HIS LIFE, HE SNEAKS OFF TO A SOLITARY PLACE AND PRAYS.

QUIET TIME – DOING NOTHING BUT TALKING TO GOD.

MANY OF US ARE TOO BUSY TO DO ANYTHING LIKE THAT!

MOST OF US FEEL LIKE WE NEED TO BE BUSY DOING SOMETHING. AND FOR SOME REASON, PRAYER JUST DOESN'T FEEL "BUSY" OR "ACTIVE" ENOUGH.

WE ARE A PEOPLE AND A SOCIETY IN WHICH BEING BUSY MAKES US FEEL LIKE WE ARE WORTHWHILE.

IF WE ARE NOT DOING SOMETHING, THERE IS SOMETHING WITHIN US THAT MAKES US FEEL LIKE WE ARE LAZY, OR THAT WE ARE WASTING OUR TIME.

FAMILIES ARE STRETCHED TO THE LIMIT WITH ACTIVITIES AS WE GO FROM BALLET CLASSES TO SOCCER TO OUTINGS AT THE BEACH TO CONCERTS TO THIS AND TO THAT.

IT IS AS IF WE ARE AFRAID OF WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF WE WOULD JUST BE STILL FOR A MOMENT.

IN OUR NEW TESTAMENT LESSON, JESUS IS VERY BUSY. IN FACT, MARK'S GOSPEL IS THE MOST 21ST CENTURY-COMPATIBLE GOSPEL THERE IS. BECAUSE MARK GIVES THE IMPRESSION THAT EVERYONE IS ALWAYS IN A HURRY – ALWAYS BUSY. THE WORD "IMMEDIATELY" APPEARS OVER 50 TIMES IN MARK'S GOSPEL.

MARK TELLS THE STORY OF JESUS BEING BAPTIZED AND THEN HE SAYS, "AND IMMEDIATELY THE HOLY SPIRIT SENT HIM INTO THE DESERT."

THEN JESUS ENCOUNTERS SIMON AND ANDREW FISHING AND INVITES THEM TO BE DISCIPLES AND MARK SAYS,

“IMMEDIATELY THEY LEFT THEIR NETS.”

JESUS HEALS PEOPLE AND CASTS OUT DEMONS, AND “IMMEDIATELY AND QUICKLY THE NEWS SPREAD ABOUT JESUS.”

AND FINALLY, AFTER A FAST -PACED BEGINNING, MARK SAYS 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.”

EVEN IN THE FAST PACED, AND VERY SUCCESSFUL AND MEANINGFUL LIFE OF JESUS, THERE WAS THE NEED TO SOMETIMES RETREAT TO A QUIET, LONELY PLACE FOR REFLECTION, MEDITATION, PRAYER AND COMMUNION WITH GOD.

THIS IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY IN OUR BUSY LIVES. IT MAKES OUR BUSY LIVES WORTHWHILE AND BEARABLE. MORE THAN BEARABLE – TIMES OF BEING IN A SOLITARY AND QUIET PLACE WITH GOD ENABLE US TO DO THE WORK WE ARE TO DO.

JESUS DOESN'T JUST GO TO THAT QUIET AND SOLITARY PLACE AND STAY THERE. HE GOES THERE TO RECHARGE HIS SPIRITUAL BATTERIES. BEING THERE ENABLES HIM TO THEN GET UP AND MOVE ONTO FIND OTHER PLACES TO PREACH HIS MESSAGE.

WOULDN'T IT BE NICE IF WE COULD, IN THE MIDST OF WORK, FAMILY PRESSURES, SCHOOL, WORK, AND JUST TURN OFF THE TELEVISION, TURN OFF THE CELL PHONES, LEAVE THE PAGERS AT HOME, AND JUST PRAY.

BEING STILL AND QUIET FROM TIME TO TIME IS GOD'S WILL FOR OUR LIVES.

FIRST, WE NEED TO REST FROM OUR WORK, AND FIND THAT SOLITARY PLACE OF QUIET.

NOT LONG AGO, A FELLOW MINISTER SHARED WITH ME A CONVERSATION HE HAD WITH ONE OF HIS PARISHIONERS. HE

SAID THAT ONE DAY AN ANGRY CHURCH MEMBER CALLED HIM UP ON THE TELEPHONE ONE MORNING, SAYING, "I PHONED YOU SATURDAY, BUT I COULDN'T GET YOU."

THE PREACHER EXPLAINED THAT IT WAS HIS DAY OFF.

"WHAT? A DAY OFF? THE DEVIL NEVER TAKES A DAY OFF!" EXCLAIMED THE MEMBER WITH HOLIER-THAN-THOU INDIGNATION.

"THAT'S RIGHT, " SAID THE MINISTER, "AND IF I DIDN'T TAKE ANY 'TIME OUT,' I WOULD BE JUST LIKE HIM!"

WE ALL NEED TIMES IN OUR WEEK WHEN WE SLOW DOWN AND BECOME STILL AND QUIET BECAUSE IT IS VITAL FOR OUR SOUL. SO IMPORTANT IS THIS PRINCIPLE, THAT GOD MADE THE COMMAND FOR A DAY OF REST, A SABBATH, PART OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

ACCORDING TO TRADITION, WHEN THE APOSTLE JOHN WAS BISHOP IN EPHESUS, HIS HOBBY WAS RAISING PIGEONS. ON ONE OCCASION AN EPHESIAN ELDER PASSED HIS HOUSE AS HE RETURNED FROM HUNTING. WHEN HE SAW JOHN PLAYING WITH ONE OF HIS BIRDS, HE GENTLY CRITICIZED THE OLD APOSTLE FOR SPENDING HIS TIME SO FRIVOLOUSLY.

JOHN LOOKED AT HIS CRITIC'S BOW AND REMARKED THAT THE STRING WAS LOOSENEED.

"YES," SAID THE HUNTSMAN, "I ALSO LOOSEN THE STRING OF MY BOW WHEN IT'S NOT IN USE. IF IT ALWAYS STAYED TIGHT, IT WOULD LOSE ITS REBOUNING QUALITY AND FAIL ME IN THE HUNT."

"AND I," SAID JOHN, "AM NOW RELAXING THE BOW OF MY MIND SO THAT I MAY BE BETTER ABLE TO SHOOT THE ARROWS OF DIVINE TRUTH."

SECOND, WHEN WE HAVE THAT TIME IN A SOLITARY PLACE, WE NEED TO PRAY.

THAT'S WHAT JESUS DID. HE WENT TO HIS SOLITARY PLACE TO PRAY.

PRAYER IS NOT ALWAYS A MATTER OF TALKING TO GOD, OR TELLING GOD A LIST OF THINGS THAT WE NEED FOR HIM TO DO.

PRAYER IS SPENDING TIME WITH GOD. IT MIGHT INVOLVE ASKING FOR THINGS. IT MIGHT INVOLVE THANKING GOD FOR THINGS. IT MIGHT BE SIMPLY BEING WITH GOD.

HAVE YOU EVER SIMPLY SPENT TIME WITH SOMEONE, AND YOU ARE BOTH JUST QUIET. NOT REALLY SAYING ANYTHING. JUST QUIETLY BEING TOGETHER. PERHAPS WITH YOUR SPOUSE. OR HOLDING YOUR CHILD. OR AT THE BEDSIDE OF YOUR SICK PARENT.

WE NEED MORE OF THAT TIME SPENT WITH GOD.

QUIET TIME WITH GOD.

WE WILL RARELY FIND GOD IN THE HECTIC MOMENTS IN OUR LIVES, BUT WE WILL OFTEN FIND HIM IN THE QUIET MOMENTS.

ELIJAH, IN THE BIBLE, HAD AN INTERESTING EXPERIENCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOK OF I KINGS (19:11-12).

THE LORD TOLD THIS PROPHET, "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.

AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE CAME A FIRE, BUT THE LORD WAS NOT IN THE FIRE. AND AFTER THE FIRE CAME A GENTLE WHISPER, A "STILL, SMALL VOICE."

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN YOU SHOULD NOT JUST DO THINGS IN LIFE, BUT YOU SHOULD SIT THERE. BE STILL. BE QUIET. BE IN PRAYER.

BUT AT THE END OF THE PRAYER, WHEN YOU SAY AMEN, THAT SHOULD BE A WORD THAT CALLS YOU TO ACTION. YOU SHOULD NOT JUST SIT THERE IN LIFE, BUT DO SOMETHING.

THAT'S WHAT JESUS DID.

IN OUR NEW TESTAMENT LESSON, HE SNEAKS OFF FOR PRAYER IN A QUIET SOLITARY PLACE. THE DISCIPLES FIND HIM AND AT THE END OF THE PRAYER TIME, JESUS GETS UP AND GETS ON WITH LIFE. IN MARK'S GOSPEL, JESUS TELLS HIS DISCIPLES, "LET US GO SOMEWHERE ELSE-- TO THE NEARBY VILLAGES-- SO I CAN PREACH THERE ALSO. THAT IS WHY I HAVE COME."

AT THE END OF YOUR PRAYER, WHEN YOU SAY AMEN, WHAT ACTION DO YOU DO? DO YOU PRAY FOR THE SICK AND THEN LEAVE IT AT THAT? OR DO YOU PRAY FOR THE SICK, AND THEN PICK UP THE PHONE AND CALL THEM TO LET THEM KNOW YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT THEM. DO YOU ASK IF YOU CAN DO ANYTHING FOR THEM? A HOT MEAL BROUGHT TO THEIR HOME? MEDICINE THEY NEED TO HAVE PICKED UP?

DO YOU PRAY FOR THE POOR AND HOPE GOD DOES SOMETHING ABOUT THE POOR? OR DO YOU PRAY AND ASK GOD TO USE YOU? DO YOU PUT ACTIONS TO YOUR PRAYER, GIVING TO THE POOR, WORKING WITH HABITAT FOR HUMANITY, DONATING TO THE FOOD PANTRY AT THE LILBURN CO-OP?

DO YOU PRAY THAT GOD WOULD HELP OUR CHURCH GROW AND THEN HOPE THAT GOD INSPIRES SOMEONE TO DO SOMETHING? OR DO YOU PRAY AND THEN SAY AS JESUS SAID, "I HAVE TO GO SOMEWHERE SO I CAN TELL SOMEONE ABOUT THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRIST."

OUR LIVES ARE SO BUSY.

WE NEED TO STOP FROM TIME TO TIME AND GO TO THAT SOLITARY PLACE FOR PRAYER. AND THEN AT THE END OF THE PRAYER, GET UP AND GET BUSY WITH THE THINGS THAT ARE MOST IMPORTANT – THE WORK OF GOD. IN THE NAME OF JESUS. AMEN