

"Searching for Jesus"

February 5, 2012

Isaiah 40:21-31 and Mark 1:29-38

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

West Walworth: Zion United Methodist Church

Mark 1:29-39

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

That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. 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. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." 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." And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Prayer.

If given a choice between
waiting for a certain, but long term benefit

or

claiming an immediate, but less than certain short term gain,
most people would roll the dice and take their chances:

the majority of us, I'm told

would go for the immediate, but uncertain gratification.

(With thanks to Steed Davidson, Associate Professor of Old Testament, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkley, CA as found at workingpreacher.org)

We don't like to wait.

We do not want to start a college savings account the day our children are born.

We don't like to begin investing in a long term retirement account before the age of 50.

But, oh, how we love to howl

when we get that first tuition payment notice in the mail,

or have a financial advisor calculate how little you're going to have in retirement.

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Such was the dilemma of our Hebrew ancestors
who found themselves as prisoners of war, exiled in Babylonian captivity, crying for Zion on the
banks of the Tigris and Euphrates.

They did not understand the events of the present
nor the profound place they stood in the larger, creative, salvation history of God.

They were tempted by the immediate:

the cheaply created Babylonian idols (as described in Isaiah 40:18-20)

18 To whom then will you liken God,
or what likeness compare with him?

19 An idol? —A workman casts it,
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold,
and casts for it silver chains.

20 As a gift one chooses mulberry wood
—wood that will not rot—
then seeks out a skilled artisan
to set up an image that will not topple.

Really? Really, people?

25 To whom then will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes on high and see:
Who created these?

He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;
because he is great in strength,
mighty in power,
not one is missing.

Apparently the temptation for immediate gratification is not just a western American
phenomena;

Why wait for God

when my simple force of will can get the job done?

Why turn to God

when I can just do it myself?

After all, we justify,

"God helps those who help themselves."

Hear of God's might and be in His awe (Isaiah 40:12-17):

12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand
and marked off the heavens with a span,
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure,

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and weighed the mountains in scales
and the hills in a balance?

13 Who has directed the spirit of the Lord,
or as his counsellor has instructed him?

14 Whom did he consult for his enlightenment,
and who taught him the path of justice?

Who taught him knowledge,
and showed him the way of understanding?

15 Even the nations are like a drop from a bucket,
and are accounted as dust on the scales;
see, he takes up the isles like fine dust.

16 Lebanon would not provide fuel enough,
nor are its animals enough for a burnt-offering.

17 All the nations are as nothing before him;
they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

Sometimes we get so bogged down in the immediacy of the moment that
we lose a sense of the larger picture,

of God's greater plan,
of God's greater glory.

We know what we see.

We have hope in what the Word of God allows us to imagine.

Yet, there is still so much more to the completeness of God
that stretches beyond the horizon,
beyond the limits of our human imagination.

Such was the case in our Gospel lesson for this morning.

In this first chapter of Mark we have:

witnessed the birth of Jesus,
his baptism and possession by the Holy Spirit,
his calling of disciples, and
last Sunday, his exorcism of a demon possessed man.

Jesus is preaching, teaching, healing, and casting out demons in his familiar region of Galilee.

This was bound to gather a crowd,
and boy did it ever! ... in spades!

A minority would have been drawn because of his authoritative teaching.

"This guy really knows what he's talking about."

Others would have been attracted by his messianic potential.

"Let's see if Jesus has the muster to kick Rome to the curb and re-establish the Kingdom to the
size and glory of David."

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But the majority of people
 would have been drawn by Jesus' miracles:
 healing the sick and casting out of demons.
 You've heard our Prayers of the People,
 so it should come as no surprise to you.
 We all know someone who needs the personal attention of our God
 (who assures us that if we ask for what ever we need, God will grant it to us).
 At one time or another
 everyone needs the miraculous power of Jesus;
 to be able to reach out and touch his garment and be healed,
 to have the demons of our obsessions cast out and be thrown into a heard of pigs.
 "Fix me now and I'll follow you later" sounds a lot like
 Wimpey's out-of-money promise "I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today."

Jesus no sooner heals Peter's mother-in-law,
 and she rises to begin to immediately serve,
 then he opens the door to find the street crowded with hundreds of people
 - the whole "city was gathered around the door" -
 begging Jesus to heal them, too.
 "You did it for him; do it for me, too!"
 "You caste out her demon; caste out mine, too!"
 "You can't just turn your back on my son and daughter!"
 "Touch me Jesus! heal me Jesus!"
 So, Jesus did what he does best:
 He healed them.
 He caste out their demons and didn't let them speak.
 All day long, until way after sun down,
 Jesus touched, and healed, and caste out every last one of them.
 Then he retreated to a deserted place to pray.

Much could be mused about how this is a wonderful example for each of us
 to draw away for a time of rest and prayer;
 to recharge our spiritual batteries, If you will.
 However, this would be a tragic misdirection of the Good News for this morning.
 The point that Jesus means to make comes
 when he addresses those who hunted for him;
 who've been searching for him:
 "Let us go to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also;
 for that is what I came out to do."

There you have it:

Jesus didn't come to heal an individual's infirmities,
even though he did because that was his nature;

Jesus healed to draw attention to his message

- the signature of God's emerging kingdom is forgiveness, love, and salvation.

Jesus didn't cast out demons just for the sake of casting out demons;

Jesus did so to demonstrate that the power and majesty of God exceeds that of sin, evil, and death.

The short-term benefits of Jesus' miracles

pointed to the long term reality of God and His emerging, eternal kingdom.

In the story of the man possessed last week,

and in the healing stories of today,

we see how good that good news was:

part of God's reign is the casting out of demons and the turning aside of illnesses;

it has to do with restoration of those oppressed to a full role in their communities;

it has to do with creating a restored people raised up to serve each other - like Peter's mother-in-law;

and it has to do with recognizing these tactics of Jesus

in the larger strategy of God

amidst His redemptive and salvation trajectory.

And people do come;

they come in numbers,

trusting that Jesus will heal and restore.

(With thanks to Sarah Henrich, Professor of New Testament, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN as found at workingpreacher.org)

Today, Jesus continues to heal the sick and cast out demons;

he does it through the Holy Spirit working through our hearts and our hands.

Life may break us.

Jesus is here to restore us.

And he is dependent upon each of us to serve as his hands and his heart;

to overcome evil in this world, replacing it with His glory,

to repair the brokenness of this world, healing all with the Love that only Christ can bring.

In doing so, can we be like Peter's mother-in-law?

who, when healed of her fever, rose and set about to serve?

I believe we can.

What we do, how we do it, and

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what we say, how we say it

... everything ...

is to point to the same message that Jesus came to proclaim.

"Lift up your eyes on high and see" the prophet Isaiah proclaims.

God created, and continues to create;

God loves the world enough to send us His Son, and continues to love;

God forgave, and continues to forgive;

God saved, and continues to save every day.

Let us rest this, our hope, in God's greater glory.

Amen.

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