

Sermon Notes – February 07, 2021

“Time Alone With Jesus”

(Mark 1:29-39)

Three middle-aged men (Joe, Fred, and Tom) were discussing the possibility of sudden death. “What would you do if you knew you only had four weeks of life remaining?” Joe asked. “First of all,” said Fred, “I would quit my job and for those four weeks I would do nothing but fish.” “Not me,” said Tom, “For those four weeks I would spend as much time as possible with my children and let them know how much I love them.” Joe thought for a few moments and then said, “I’ll tell you what I would do. For those four weeks, I would travel throughout the United States with my wife and my mother-in-law in a tiny compact car, and stay in a cheap motel every night.” Fred and Tom were puzzled by his answer. “Why would you do that?” they asked. “Because,” Joe said sarcastically, “It would be the longest four weeks of my life.”

Today in our Gospel lesson Jesus heals Simon Peter’s mother-in-law of what Bible scholars called “a burning fever.” The mother-in-law’s fever was probably some type of bad infection, but in ancient times it was believed to be caused by demons or a curse and could only be healed by Yahweh (God). And who happens to visit her home – Jesus, the Son of God! Jesus touches her hand and she is healed, according to the scriptures, and she proceeds to get up and serve food to Jesus and the disciples gathered in her home that day.

Most of us probably know someone who has been healed by Jesus. Many years ago Dr. Robert Schuller, Pastor of The Crystal Cathedral in California told a story in one of his books about the healing of Lory Jones. (Lory was married to the actor Dean Jones, who starred in some of the Walt Disney classic movies – “The Love Bug,” “The Shaggy D.A.,” “The Teddy Bears,” etc.) One summer Lory and Dean Jones traveled on vacation to Mexico City. While there, Lory wanted to tour one of the big Catholic Cathedrals. As she and Dean were finishing their tour, the priest said, “If anyone would like to pray, now would be a good time before you exit.” Lory told Dean, “Let’s pray for God to heal my arthritis. You know

how much and how long I've suffered with these arthritic hands - all the aspirin I take, etc." Dean was known not to be a man of faith, but since he loved his wife so much and he knew how many years she had suffered with arthritis, he succumbed to a one sentence prayer - "God, heal my wife of arthritis." Quickly he walked out of the cathedral, leaving Lory on her knees praying. A short while later she came out of the cathedral and told her husband, "I felt something in there and I feel different." Dean said, "Well, if praying and faith make you feel better, I am happy for you." Three days later Dean noticed his wife, Lory, wasn't taking any aspirin and had not asked him to rub her hands. Two weeks passed, two months, and then six months passed and she wasn't taking aspirin. One year later she was examined by a doctor and no evidence of arthritis was seen in the scans of her hands. Lory considered it a healing miracle from Jesus, and believe it or not, her husband Dean later professed faith in Jesus Christ.

Some people are still healed today and we can't explain it. Still many others pray for healing and it doesn't happen. I can't give you a reason. In Jesus' day many people came to him for healing. Right after the healing of Simon's mother-in-law people from the town of Capernaum filled the house and courtyard for Jesus to heal their family or friends. Can you imagine the pressure on Jesus - "Jesus, heal my son," "Rabbi, cast the demon from my child," "Master, my brother is lame and needs healing," "Jesus help me!" Jesus popularity increased with every healing and the pressure upon him grew. Jesus knew that he was now on God's timetable and he had a short time - three years to preach, teach, heal people, disciple his followers, and reveal God's character to the world; speaking of pressure, Jesus knew what that felt like.

How did Jesus deal with his pressure? In our Gospel lesson today we learn that Jesus, in the early morning hours while it was still dark, went out to a quiet and solitary place to pray. If Jesus needed to pray, don't you think we need to do so? **Jesus dealt with his pressure and the demands of people by praying to God the Father.**

I wonder if we need to get away from the noise and distractions of life and find a place of silence and solitude to be alone with God – a few minutes away from the TV, radio, Facebook, our phone, family, friends, etc.

Notice what happens to Jesus when he returns from praying. In the Gospel lesson it tells us Simon and the others went looking for Jesus and when they found him, he said to Simon, “Let us go to the nearby villages that I may preach there, too – for that is why I came.” Jesus knew that healing and helping others was definitely part of his mission from God, but the bigger part was to proclaim the good news of God’s love and salvation to others. Jesus, in his prayer time, was reminded and strengthened for his mission in life – to live, preach, teach, and to die for our sins and to be resurrected for us. In his prayer time with God, Jesus was reaffirmed of his focus and God’s mission, and he received power to carry out God’s mission. *God gave Jesus the power to preach the good news, to heal the sick, to cast out demons, to meet the needs of people and to deal with their demands, and to make a difference in our lives for eternity. **When we get away in solitude with God and pray, we, too, can regain our focus, reframe our attitude, and find strength and courage to deal with whatever comes our way that day.***

Some of you have probably heard the name or remember, Randall Cunningham, Sr. He was the NFL quarterback for the Philadelphia Eagles and the Minnesota Vikings for years. In his NFL retirement, he went back to school and prepared for the Protestant ministry; he now serves as a chaplain to teams in the National Football League. In a book about his life, his wife recalls how Randall would get up every morning when the alarm went off. He didn’t stand up; he just rolled out of bed on his knees, and humbly prayed to God every morning – he would thank God for a good night’s rest and His watchcare and asked God for strength and courage to deal with the day ahead of him. She said Randall Cunningham did this every morning, before going to the bathroom, getting his coffee, etc. Randall Cunningham received the strength and power he needed for his day from his quiet time of prayer with God each morning.

One of the best ways we can cope with our feelings of pressure and being overwhelmed is to spend some time in prayer with God away from the noise and distractions. Maybe we need to do it on the porch, in the bathroom, in the bed, on our walking trail - wherever we can get away for a few moments of quiet time with Jesus.

I read in a book where the author created an acrostic for the word, "PRAY." "P" stands for "praise God" - acknowledge and thank Him for who He is - your Savior, your Friend, your Heavenly Father and for all He does for you - his goodness, his love, his forgiveness, and for his gifts to you - your kids, your talents and abilities, etc. "R" stands for "repent"; confess your sins to God and seek His forgiveness. Be brutally honest and real with God about your stinking thinking, bad attitude, hurtful actions, etc. "A" stands for "ask for yourself and others" - share with God your needs and concerns for yourself and others; "Y" stands for "yield yourself to God" - pray not my will, but yours be done, O God. So often we can be selfish and want just what we want. God is interested in transforming us and giving us what is best - even though we may not always understand at the time.

In prayer, away from the noise and distraction, we can share and talk with God and listen. Sometimes in my frantic times of desperation and despair, I seek God with all my heart and mind and soul, and God brings to me a peace and solace within; it comes when I surrender to Him and stop trying to do all and be all in my own power.

How did Jesus deal with pressure and the demands of people? He got away to a place of solitude and prayed to His Heavenly Father, and there He was able to refocus and find strength and power to do what lay ahead of Him. We, too, need to pray - away from the noise and distractions of everyday life, and there find strength in God for the living of our days, no matter what we face. Life is stressful for all of us, especially in this COVID-19 pandemic. May we find strength, comfort, and courage for the living of our days through our quiet times alone with God.