

Church of the Divine Love

**Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany**

February 7, 2021 10:15 A.M.

Morning Prayer, Rite I

*All pages refer to The Book of Common Prayer*

*ZOOM CHURCH ONLY THIS WEEK DUE TO WEATHER*

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## **Sermon Sunday February 7, 2021**

Isaiah 40: 21-31; Psalm 147: 1-12, 21; 1 Corinthians 9: 16-23; Mark 1: 29-39

### **PRAYING IN OUR DESERTED PLACES**

#### **Sisters and brothers in Christ,**

It is only the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark, but already Jesus is performing miracles—and dealing with crowds who are clamoring for more miracles—and dealing with disciples who do not understand his ministry. Already he is withdrawing to a deserted place for prayer. Everyone loves it when Jesus shows up. His presence makes a difference. Things happen. Mother-in-laws are healed. The sick is cured. Demons are cast out. Lives are changed. This is true not only for the people of Capernaum in Jesus' time but also for us here and now. He comes to our house as surely as he went to the house of Simon and Andrew. Let me tell you about some houses that have been visited.

I know an alcoholic who says that one day he prayed, and Jesus removed from him the compulsion to drink. He has been sobering ever since. I remember a man who had a vision of Jesus reaching out and taking him by the hand. I have heard men and women tell the story of how Jesus called them into the priesthood. Some people have told me about experiences of calmness and peace that came from Jesus' presence. Others tell how his strength and grace carried you through days you were sure you could not survive. Several years ago, I spent the night in a hospital with a man waiting and watching for his wife to die. It was a holy death; nothing short of miraculous. I know people who have wept for joy and gratitude in the presence of Christ. There are lots of people who get together in a group each week and talk about their moment closest to Christ. It happens. Those experiences are real. Jesus is present and active in our lives and the world. Those are the kind of things, as St. Mark tells us, for which people line up at Jesus' door. Faith comes a bit easier in those moments. Jesus is real. His presence is felt. Results are seen. All is well.

What happens, though, when we awaken to find ourselves in the nighttime of life? You know as well as I do that there are times when life is only plain hard. We don't get our way. Things happen that we never

wanted to have happened. Faith is difficult and its results are not so tangible. In those times it seems as if there is only darkness and Jesus is nowhere to be seen. Some will assume he has forsaken them. They will abandon their faith. They will give up on the Church and Jesus himself. So, what do we do when Jesus sneaks off and we feel all alone? That's the nighttime question. According to today's gospel that time will come. Jesus will get up in the early morning hours, while it's still very dark, and go to a deserted place. This is not, however, about Jesus escaping or getting away. It's about prayer; his and ours. It's no longer about what is happening around us or to us but what is happening within us.

Regardless of how dark it may seem Jesus never leaves us. He may withdraw but that does not mean he is absent. His withdrawing is an invitation for us to move to a new place, to the deserted place. He calls us out of the comfort of the house into the vulnerability of the wilderness. It is a deserted and desolate place; a place where there is only prayer. There, we are alone with the Alone. We all have deserted places in our lives. For some it is accepting the limitations that age and disease bring. Others deal with broken relationships. Loneliness and grief are desert places for some. The struggle to make ends meet in a drought stricken failing economy is a wilderness many are trying to escape. You could each name your own wildernesses and deserts.

Most of us don't like the deserted places. We tend to avoid them. They are empty places that can be scary and dangerous. There is nowhere to hide. We must face up to who we are and who we are not. We are confronted by things done and left undone. Our sorrows and losses are laid bare in the deserted place. We begin to recognize that our successes, possessions, and accomplishments don't ultimately count for much. In the wilderness we must admit we are not in control. Time in the deserted place is a matter of life and death. It is also, however, the place where our deepest healing can happen.

He could spend the rest of his days healing and never run out of opportunity, never run out of appreciation. But praying in that deserted place early in the morning Jesus must have come to the painful realization that all healing is temporary. We get well only to get sick again. We stand up only to fall down. In the end these mortal bodies of ours must surrender to their mortality, and even if we had been healed by Jesus fifty times in our hundred years we would still die physically. It was that thought that must have come to his clouded mind in the sobering act of prayer. And when the disciples came looking for him, he was ready.

There is a price, though, for going to the wilderness. We must trade the security of the house for the risk of the desert. The wilderness prayer of self-surrender must begin to replace the house prayer that only asks for things to happen or change. Wilderness prayer doesn't ask so much that circumstances will be changed but that we will be changed. The wilderness makes that change possible. Jesus goes to the deserted places of our lives to draw us there. If he didn't go first, if he didn't invite us to that place, my hunch is that none of us would ever go there. Yet, the wilderness and desert places of our lives are sacred places. In the desert there is only God, there is nothing but God. Jesus is drawing us deeper and deeper into the heart of God. Ironically, that happens in the very place we thought was barren, empty, and desolate. The deserted places of our lives are the places of Jesus' prayer. They are the starting point for his message of good news. Good news comes from the empty and desolate places. Jesus will leave this deserted place to go proclaim his message in the neighboring towns. Before today's gospel Jesus emerged from the wilderness saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe the good news" (Mk. 1:15). Before him was "the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord'" (Mk.1:3). Before that the voice of God spoke creation into existence when "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep" (Gen. 1:2).

New life arises from the deserted and empty places. The good news of Christ comes from the wilderness.

Everyone is searching for you, they told Jesus. Yet Simon and his companions were the only ones to find him. Maybe they were the only ones willing to go to the deserted place. I wonder where the others were searching. The safety of town? The familiarity of neighboring houses? Standing in line at the door? I wonder where we will search when the nighttime of our life comes. Go to the deserted places of your life, places that you think are barren, empty, desolate, and there you will find Jesus, praying. **AMEN!**

### **Prayer for Grace and Favor in the New Year:**

**Dear God, we ask that you provide for our needs, we ask for your grace and favor. We pray for your blessings to cover us; we pray that you would help us to prosper and make every plan that you have birthed in our heart to succeed. We pray that others would take notice of your goodness and could not help but say, “these are the ones that the Lord has blessed.” Shine your light in us, through us. May we make a difference in this world, for your glory and purposes. Set your way before us. May all your plans succeed. We may reflect your peace and hope to a world that so desperately needs your presence and healing. In Jesus Name, Amen.**

## PARISH PRAYER LIST

Barbara Curran	Phil and Family
Dina Palkowski	Lois Kessler
Frances & Donna Mongelli	Bernie Walther
Nathan Treadwell	Donna
Tyler Gorman	Kim
Chris Dickson	Rachael
Michael Echevarria	Caesar
Donny	Bill Conklin
Michael & Family	Anthony Paribello
Martinisi Family	Edward Lent
Matt Marricco	Kate Jones
Kathleen	Del
Irene	Girard Bishop
Warren	

### Children who are ill:

Franklin Tenesaca	Ciara Berbeck
Michael	Christopher
Gabriel	Emily

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bishop's Directive – When attending services we are all required to wear a mask ,use hand sanitizer, sign in with name and phone number for tracing purposes, and only sit in pews with decals

**The Thrift Shop will be closed for the month of February.**

5 EPIHANY

10:15 AM MORNING PRAYER (ONLY ON ZOOM TODAY DUE TO WEATHER)

MONDAY

8:00 AM AA MEETING

WEDNESDAY

7:00 PM AL-ANON MEETING

THURSDAY

8:00 PM AA MEETING

LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

10:15 AM MORNING PRAYER (also on zoom)

SUPPORT THE FOOD DRIVE DROP-OFF IN THE KITCHEN