

Take time to pray
Mark 1:29-39

Our reading today tells of Jesus' actions during a very busy day. Prior to these verses, he had been baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, immediately driven by the Holy Spirit out into the desert for 40 days of testing by Satan. Upon returning from the desert, he immediately called four men to be his disciples. These men have barely caught up to the walking Jesus, when he enters the local synagogue, reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah announcing that prophecy had been fulfilled that day, astounding the congregation. He then healed a demon-possessed man in the synagogue on the Sabbath (a big no-no by the way) and then proceeded to Simon's house, only to find the hostess sick in bed. With a touch Simon's mother-in-law is restored to health (again on the Sabbath, and against the current social mores that men don't touch unrelated women, Jesus is on a roll!). As soon as she rises from her sickbed, the woman begins to serve the gathered men in her kitchen. Whew! Let's catch our breath, but there is no time because word of Jesus' healing of Simon's mother-in-law has spread throughout the village and people are flocking to her door with their sick and disabled loved ones asking that Jesus do the same for them. This goes on well into the night before someone finally closes the door and says

come back tomorrow. I can just picture an exhausted Jesus falling into bed, too tired to even remove his sandals. Let's catch our breath here.

Mark could very well have been writing about life in 21st century America. He sees Jesus' actions as happening in rapid fire succession, much like many of our days. Have you ever had a day like this:

Wake at 6 am and start the coffee maker.

Get breakfast on the table for the children by 6:30, so they can be out the door to the school bus by 6:50

Hop in the shower, dress, grab that cup of coffee as you run out the door at 7:20, so you can be at work by 8 am.

8-8:30 you check email, voicemail, and notes left on your desk before signing on to a Zoom meeting at 8:30.

At 10 you sign off the Zoom meeting, and get together with your support team to summarize the meeting.

At 12 you call the local fast-food joint to pre-order your lunch, at 12:15 you run down the block to pick it up and return to your desk where you will eat while you work on the new project until 5.

Clocking out a 5 that 30-minute morning commute is now a 60-minute commute home due to increased traffic.

Walking in the house at 6, the first question you hear is "what's for dinner?"

A quickly prepared dinner hits the table at 6:30 and the table is cleared by 6:45

From 6:45 until 9 you help with homework, get the children bathed and ready for bed.

At 9 you collapse into your easy chair only to hear the cry at 9:10 “I want a drink of water”

You slog up the stairs, deliver the water, stumble down the hall to your bedroom and collapse on the bed. Your day has come to an end. Was there any time to pray? I think Mark could have been writing for such a time as this!

Back to our story, after a few hours’ sleep we read 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.” He needed to “recharge his battery” so to speak. Not only that, but he also needed to hear a word from His Father. It would have been easy to get stuck where he was, as we learn in further reading. The disciples tracked him down, asking him to return to Simon’s house to continue healing those who came to the door.

Jesus’ time of prayer had prepared him for the next part of his journey. His response to the request to return to Simon’s house was, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also.

That is why I have come.” Although he was able to heal, and healed many, that was not his primary purpose. He had come to preach about the Kingdom of God. It would be important throughout his earthly ministry to be able to get away to a quiet place to pray. Time spent in prayer gave him the opportunity to hear God’s voice, receive direction, and gain the energy to continue along what he knew would be an exceedingly difficult road to travel.

Prayer was so important to Jesus’ ministry that he taught his disciples how to pray. This teaching has come down to us today as the Lord’s Prayer. Others throughout history have found the value of prayer in a busy life. The great reformer, Martin Luther, is quoted as saying, “I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.”

In our world today, we may feel like the unknown author of this poem entitled “No Time to Pray”:

I got up early one morning
And rushed right into the day;
I had so much to accomplish
That I didn’t take time to pray.

Problems just tumbled about me,
And heavier came each task,

“Why doesn’t God help me?” I wondered.

He answered, “You didn’t ask.”

I wanted to see joy and beauty,

But the day toiled on gray and bleak;

I wondered why God didn’t show me;

He said, “But you didn’t seek.”

I tried to come into God’s presence;

I used all my keys at the lock;

God gently and lovingly chided,

“My child you didn’t knock.”

I woke up early this morning,

And paused before entering the day;

I had so much to accomplish

That I had to take time to pray.

I would imagine that most of us deal with a daily to-do list. Maybe not something written down, but a list of things we know we need to accomplish on any given day. Jesus knew he had things to accomplish and a limited amount of time to get those things done, so he took the time to pray. By following His example, we would all benefit.

By spending time in prayer, we are inviting God into our lives. We can ask him to help us set our priorities for any given period of time, trusting that he goes before us at all times, everywhere. Why would we not call on our all-loving, all-powerful God to carry us through our days? As the poem points out, when we neglect to spend time with God, we miss the blessings that he has prepared for us. Paul opined the same thing in his first letter to the Thessalonians:

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

In our rush-rush modern day world, we can find it difficult to “pray continually” or even occasionally. Some might shy away from prayer because they feel they don't know the right words. Others might say it feels forced to sit with clasped hands and head bowed in prayer. Do not worry about how to pray. There are many different ways to pray, although I will not be discussing these today. I encourage you to find the style of prayer that works for you. If you are not sure of the range of styles of prayer available, I encourage you to find a book on prayer and try a few assorted styles until you find what is a right fit for you. The way you pray is not as important as the fact that you do spend time with God on a daily basis. Even Jesus understood the need to be quiet before the Lord in order to complete the task set out before him. We are no different.

It is easy for us to get started on daily prayer. We already know the basics because Jesus taught them when he instructed his disciples (that's us) to pray these words, please join me:

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. AMEN

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