

Mark 1:29-39, New Revised Standard Version

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 sunset, 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 neighbouring 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.*

Jesus has called his disciples, and his ministry of teaching and healing is now off to a roaring start. After going to the synagogue where Jesus astounds many as he teaches with authority, they head to Simon Peter's house. Maybe they went for a bit of a rest, a meal, and a sleep before the next day. But when they arrive, they find that Peter's mother-in-law is sick and in bed with a high fever. Jesus heals her. Immediately she gets up and serves them! The rest for the mother-in-law (and it seems for Jesus and the disciples) is short-lived.

Word got out about Jesus, and by sunset the whole city was at the house. The whole city! (An exaggeration by Mark, but still.) People brought those who were sick to him, and he healed many. And he cast out many demons and set many people free from things that enslaved them. It started at sunset ... a huge crowd! It must have felt like the day was just beginning when it was supposed to be winding down. I don't know when people finally got tired and went home, or when Jesus and the disciples just went into the house and closed the door on the crowd, but it was likely very late when they got to bed. A pretty awesome start to the ministry! I can imagine the disciples having a hard time settling down to sleep – I mean what a buzz! How awesome it is following Jesus!

Just a few hours later, early the next morning while it was still very dark, Jesus gets up and sneaks out. Maybe 'sneak' isn't quite the right word, but he doesn't wake anybody up, he slips out to go and be alone. More accurately, he slips out to go and be alone with God. Back at the house, too soon I'm sure, the morning dawns and there's knocking on the door. The crowd is back. I imagine some never left and stayed camped out. All of them wanting Jesus. All of them needing Jesus. That's when the disciples notice he's not there. He's nowhere in the house. They go searching for him. "Hunting" for him is the word the NRSV uses. That's an interesting word — it suggests not only looking for, but wanting to capture, contain, control.

Eventually they find him. You can hear the frustration in their voices when they tell him “*Everyone is searching for you!*” There is great need. Does he not notice or care? Jesus has to do something. How does he react?

How would you react? Would you even recognize the moment, that you’ve been put on the spot and need to respond? More often than not we don’t, we just react. We react to everyone’s expectations and need. I likely would have said something like “Oh, I’m so sorry! I’ll come right away!” And then scurried back to get started on the work ahead.

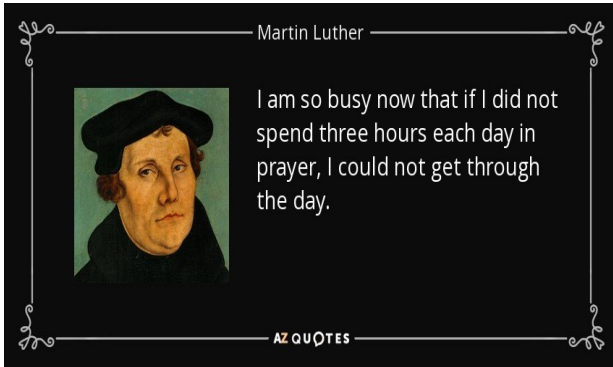
Any fellow people-pleasers out there? The first day would be good, maybe even satisfying. Look at all we’ve accomplished! The 7th and 30th days might have even been fine ... but at a certain point, fatigue and resentment can kick in. *Why am I doing all this work? Some of these people don’t even appreciate what I’m doing here, what we’re doing. They just expect us to be casting out demons all day long!* ... Ah, the life of a people- pleaser! They both like to help and resent helping because they are not so good at setting boundaries and recognizing their limitations. Of course, the non-people pleasers would react too. They too might not notice the moment. They might have a knee-jerk angry reaction. They might grumble and complain that the place clearly wasn’t as deserted as advertised. They might react with resentment that their peace was disturbed and that everyone wants a piece of them, and flat-out refuse to interrupt their precious routine.

We live in a world where the needs are great; from overseas, or your own neighborhood and family and friends. There is urgent need everywhere: the climate emergency, the ongoing horror Palestinians are facing in Gaza, racism – (which Black History month reminds us is far from gone,) food insecurity, lack of affordable housing. Plus, you’ve got your own issues and situations that need solutions.

Sometimes the anxiety of all the need is overwhelming. We’re torn between running towards it and doing something and running away from it all. We’re living in a unique time (at least it’s unique for my lifetime) where around the world and at home the troubles are rising, democracy is increasingly threatened, and caring civil society is under siege. But I studied history in my undergrad and know that there have been many times of upheaval. We happen to be living in one of them. Living in a world where it feels like the need is everywhere, is not really so new. How do you live in such a time? How are we as Christians called to live and respond?

Right here, at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus sets up a model for how to live an anchored life in a sea of need. Jesus, fully God and fully human, Jesus in times of stress, times of overwork, times of temptation and important decision, *turns to prayer*. In the middle of the busyness and the need, *Jesus stops*. He stops and seeks God’s presence. He does it even though he is physically tired. It’s not that he has extra time— the urgent was literally pressing in around him. In the middle of all that feels urgent, he seeks out what is truly important.

I remember Martin Luther, the 16th century reformer, writing that he was too busy not to pray.



Our world has a way of crowding out the important and filling the spaces with the urgent, or worse — the trivial and wasteful.

Do you remember the famous time-quadrants that **Stephen Covey** illustrated? He demonstrated that at the end of the day we want to spend time doing important things — things that enrich our lives and the lives of others —

things like spending quality time with grandchildren, exercising, volunteering or organizing to create a better world, things like prayer and scripture reading. But the urgent in our life tends to take over — like when the dog finds and chews up a red lipstick on the white carpet in your rental home, (yes this happened to us!) or the more mundane groceries, garbage day and appointments. And Covey pointed out that we're so exhausted from all the urgent demands of life — from all the survival tactics, that we end up crashing and spending time doing things that are neither truly restful nor restorative, like scrolling endlessly through TikTok or binge-watching TV. And then we feel guilty and start reacting to the urgent again, and the cycle continues.

I find today that people are either workaholics who hardly practice any self-care, or they are so wrapped-up in care of self and their special routines that they have little concern for anyone or anything else.

Jesus is neither. Jesus is focused on the needs of others, *and* he knows that in order to do what he has been called to do, *he needs prayer and solitude*. It's a mini-time of Sabbath, of stopping and resting in God's care so that he can go forward and respond, instead of reacting to the need. If Jesus needed that time, how much more do we?

I want you to see the balance in this. I want you to see the balance of self-care and care of others. Those of you who lean towards people-pleasing or a workaholic nature need to recognize that without stopping and seeking God you will burn out or become toasty — irritable and resentful. Remember that love is not irritable or resentful. Make a spiritual practice of seeking God a priority. This might be through meditation, reading a daily devotional, or reading the Bible and praying. There are so many different ways to connect with God. Pick one that suits you and practice it!!

Those of you who lean towards your routines and are all about self-care, you need to practice reaching out and doing something that gets *you out of you*. Isolation is different from solitude. Isolation disconnects us from others, from God and even from ourselves. Your time apart – solitude – should restore you to connect. Volunteer at a Sunday Supper, in our children and youth ministry, greet people on Sunday morning. You don't have to meet every need, just meet *one* need. There are so many different ways to make a difference and meet a need beyond yourself! Jesus healed Peter's mother, and she responded by serving. When you are healed from the fever of life, like Peter's mother, respond by sharing and serving using the gifts God has given you.

Richard Rohr built a whole ministry on this balance of action and contemplation, and he called it *The Centre for Action and Contemplation*. You need both. Jesus modelled both.

It's not just people who need to stop and practice sabbath, and to stop and seek God's presence — we as a church do too. For nearly a year we have sought to do this as we entered into the visioning process. We have been prayerful through the year. And we have gone through a discernment process to better understand what we are called to as we look to the future. It's easy to be so busy doing church the way we've always done it, along with reacting to every need — both the needs of people and the needs of the building— to miss what is important. It is easy to be so busy that *we miss the call*. As we've been going through our Visioning process at the church, one thing that has become clear is that we haven't always been practicing self-care at the church. Before Christmas a small group was tasked with taking the values that the congregation named as important in September and imagining a 10-year, 3-year and 1-year future. One of the things that came up was that our tag line is wonderful: **God Loves ALL. So Do We**. It speaks to who we are, but the tag line might also be tripping us up. We have internalized it so much we sometimes think the tag line is **God Loves ALL, so we must do it all!**

We do a lot here. We do so much wonderful work. But the truth is we only have so much time, so many leaders and volunteers, so much money, so much space and resources. As we go forward, we have to go deeper and be rooted in God's call. We have to understand what we are specifically called to.

Jesus got up early to pray because he knew he needed it. That prayer anchors him and changes him. Instead of reacting when the disciples come hunting for him, he responds. He responds out of that centre of prayer. The temptation is to go back and meet the needs of all those people — but Jesus doesn't 'people please', he pleases God. He is true to what he is called to do, to what only he can do. "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; **for that is what I came out to do.**"

For that is what I came to out to do! What were you created to do at this time and stage of your life? It might be big, and it might be small in the eyes of the world. What is this church called and created to do today and into the future? Do you see that as Jesus said **yes** to his calling, he also said **no** to what was **not** his calling. That can be hard. It wasn't easy for Peter and Andrew, James and John either. That was their home town. They knew those people who needed healing! But Jesus said it was time to move on to the neighbouring towns.

You might hunt for Jesus, but you will never capture him. But if you choose to follow, if you take time to stop and go deeper in your faith, you will be captivated. You will make a difference far beyond what you could do on your own. "Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit' says the Lord." (Zach 4:6) You will experience the glory of God.

Next week, the scripture takes us to the top of a mountain where the disciples truly experience the glory of God. Amen