

**Spending Downtime With God**

**February 4, 2018**

**Mark1:29-39**

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from our Lord, Jesu Christ, amen.

A Pastor had a conversation concerning Sunday morning worship with some of the parish members. Each of them shared his or her favorite part of the service. One person said it was the Creed, because it was at that moment that he was able to stand up and declare his faith. Another said it was the Music, the songs and hymns deeply moved her. One elderly lady said it was the Liturgy. She shared it meant so much to her to know we followed the same worship structure as the early Church. Another person said it was the prelude… The pastor looked at the person and was somewhat taken aback. “The Prelude? Don't you mean the Sermon?” “Oh no, pastor. It's definitely the prelude.” When asked what made the prelude so meaningful, he said his whole week is always so full, so busy, so intense, but when he enters the Sanctuary and the prelude began, it’s the only time all week when he could just sit back, be quiet, and experience the presence of the Lord.

Most of us are simply too busy or make ourselves too busy to stop to relax to be still before the Lord, even for just a few moments. We feel the need to be active every waking minute of our days. We confuse busyness with being productive, and being successful with being meaningful.

We find in our Gospel text Jesus too, was busy with life. Yet, in the midst of this busyness, he finds time, he makes time, to find a solitary place to pray. A Quiet time - a time alone - with the Father. Most of us feel as if we need to be busy doing something all of the time. For some reason, prayer for many just doesn’t feel "busy" or "active" enough. We’re a people, a society where being busy makes us feel worthwhile.

So many technological advances have taken things that used to take a long time or even all day to accomplish and can now be done in minutes. Take the microwave oven as one small example. Everything from thawing out frozen meat to cooking whole meals in minutes. What a time saver! So what happened to all that extra time? Did we end up with more time to relax with more quiet time? No, we filled our time with other duties, with other busyness. The invention of the computer had a similar effect. It enabled us to work so much faster. Yet did we find more free time, more quiet time? No, we just filled the time with more stuff.

It’s almost like we fear the quiet, like some fear the unknown of the dark. Even in my free time I have to play a Radio or the Television in the background. I need noise. It’s like there’s something within us compelling us to fill up every moment. I actually believe we’re afraid of what might happen if we would just be still and be quiet before God. I’m not implying we’re afraid of what God might do to us, but I believe we’re afraid of what God might ask of us. We’re afraid of what others might think about us if they discover you spend 30 minutes or more each day doing absolutely nothing except being present before God and listening for His still small voice. The Scriptures state this command to all believers: “Be still and know that I am God.” Be still… It’s a command.

In our Gospel reading from Mark, Jesus is very busy. In fact, Mark's Gospel might be the Gospel most compatible with the 21st Century culture. Mark gives the impression everyone’s in a hurry--everyone is so busy. In fact, the word immediately appears over 50 times in Mark's short Gospel. As hurried and busy as life was at that time for Jesus, he still made it a priority to be in the prescience of Our Heavenly Father. He made it his most important priority, I would argue, to be in prayer with His Father. Why is it so important for this down time? What good comes from such idleness, even in the face of so much work to do?

For Jesus, His time away wasn’t just a retreat in order to recharge his spiritual batteries. Mark says, “In the morning while it was still dark Jesus went away to a deserted place.” Jesus had just completed his first extremely successful day of ministry. He went from a public demonstration of his power, casting out the demon from that poor man in the Synagogue, to healing Peter’s Mother-In-Law, to the demands of the entire town in need of healing. His brain must have been spinning. People were treating him like we treat genuine Rock Stars today. At this point Jesus had some important decisions to make. He could certainly stay in Capernaum and become their personal priest and live out his life being adored and loved. The problem with that scenario was that Jesus recognized God’s call to something bigger, something that wouldn’t just change the lives of those people living in the small town of Capernaum, but a call to change the world and the hearts of all humankind. In the fast paced, immediate world Mark portrays of the beginning of Jesus’ ministry there was precious little time to discern God’s will and God’s plan.

Once upon a time a certain minister received a call from one of his parishioners. The man sounded pretty angry as he told the Pastor he had called him up on the telephone on Saturday, the Pastor didn’t answer the phone. The pastor explained it was his day off and he needed time to recharge physically and spiritually. He reminded the parishioner he always checks the phone messages in case there is an emergency to which the angry parishioner replied, “What! A day off! The devil never takes a day off!” “That's right,” said the pastor, “and if I didn't take any time off I would be just like him! The same thing applies to you…

We all need to take charge of our lives. We need to slow down, We need to quiet our lives and be still. Not just to refresh and recharge, but to discover God’s will for your life as well. It’s vital for us in our flesh and in our soul. This is so important God made a command for a day of rest, a Sabbath. And it made God's top ten list. Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it Holy! Remember Holy means something dedicated solely to and for God.

God gave us the gift of Sabbath, the command to keep one whole day for God. During that rest, during that stillness God comes to us and speaks to us. Jesus modeled the behavior, not just for Church leaders but for each and every disciple to follow.

It was a century or more ago in the deep jungles of Africa, a traveler was making a long trek. Natives of the area were hired to carry the provisions. The first day they marched rapidly and went a great distance. The traveler had high hopes of a speedy journey. The second morning the tribesmen refused to move. For some reason they just sat and rested. When asked about this strange behavior, the traveler was informed they had gone too fast the first day and that they were waiting for their souls to catch up with their bodies. There are times when our lives move so fast we need to slow down and let our souls catch up with our bodies.

According to Early Church tradition, when the Apostle John was Bishop at Ephesus, he had a hobby of raising pigeons. On one occasion we are told an Ephesian elder passed John's home as he returned from hunting. When he saw John playing with one of his birds, he gently criticized the old Apostle for spending his time so frivolously. John looked at his critic's bow and remarked the string of his bow was very loose. The Elder and huntsman replied, “I loosen the string of my bow when it's not in use. If it always stayed tight, it would lose its power and fail me in the hunt.” “And I,” said John, “I am now relaxing the bow of my mind so I may be better able to shoot the arrows of divine truth.”

Jesus is our example. Our Lord went to his deserted place for a reason for a purpose... To pray. Prayer isn’t giving God a list of things we want him to do, no matter how selfless and noble they might be. Prayer is so much more. It’s a time of relationship. It’s a time of Communion with God Himself. It’s a time for God to affirm you and give you direction for your journey. In the Air Force Pilots need two things so they can be over the target at the right time to complete their mission. They have to have the right air speed to get to the target on time, but they also need a vector so they are heading in the right direction. Too many times we live our lives with lots of air speed, but no vector. Time spent with God will give you that vector you need to live life on the path God has called you to travel.

May we learn to slow down, find time to be still and know the Lord God. May we find the time to worship God, but also to listen to his voice. May we find our deserted place and in that place, discover a God who is waiting there to love you, to comfort you, and to remind you of your calling. May your time alone with God bless you and renew your purpose and above all give you peace. Amen.