

A Sermon
"RECHARGING"
Dr. Russ Seger
February 5, 2006

SCRIPTURE: Mark 1:29-39

And immediately he left the synagogue, and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever, and immediately they told him of her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her; and she served them. That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered **together** about the door. And he healed 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. Then in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him followed him, and **they** found him and said to him, "Every one is searching for you." And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out.: And he went throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

In the Scripture lesson for today it says that there is a time when Jesus decides that he wants to get away from everybody so he goes out in the country and he prays. Now, the disciples find him pretty quick and they want him to come back and get to work. But I want to talk about prayer.

Can you define prayer for me? Shall we get some help **from** the adults? I bet they know what it is. Can you define prayer for me or for our children this morning? Talking to God. Could be like meditation. I like what you say about talking to God, but I do way more talking when I should do a lot more listening.

But **praying is** that moment in our lives when we **pause** to think and to ask to explore things that are just beyond us. We want to have some sense of the holy or God in our lives. Now, when are times that we might pray?

When we need help. That's usually when I pray. At night. At night before we go to bed sometimes. When somebody is sick. We often pray when somebody is sick. When else **might** we pray? Do you ever say, "Rub a dub, dub, thanks for the grub. Yea God" before you eat? Do you say a blessing for your food? Yes.

What other times do you pray as adults? When the beauty is overwhelming. Sometimes **when** we're lost. When we make mistakes. That's right. When we need to ask for forgiveness.

Well, let me describe for you the things that I think are the focuses of prayer, that is when ~~we~~ talk to God. One of the ways we talk to God is to give God praise. Thank you for **this** beautiful, wonderful day. Thank you for being present with us in our world. Thank you God for the awesome **world** that ~~we~~ see.

That's kind of what Isaiah was saying this morning. Who puts the stars in place, anyhow, **and** knows them all. Isaiah was kind of praying, "WOW! God's really big. But that's not the **only** time we pray. Sometimes we have to pray when we're concerned about others. Now in church I do that at the time of the pastoral prayer and I invite everyone to raise up their concerns...if somebody is sick or hurting or is afraid or they are struggling

with their disease or they are having troubles in their lives and we call that intercessory prayer. That is, we are praying for another person. Sometimes it's good for us to pray for another person. My mentor pastor when I was a young preacher said to me once, "Russ, never get yourself in a spot where you're praying for yourself before you pray for others." Never get yourself in that spot where you pray about money, "Lord provide" before you can focus on the other people as a pastor. And so, intercession, praying for other people.

But it's **not** wrong to pray for ourselves either, is it? Sometimes we need help. Boy, I need an answer to this dilemma. Lot's of years ago I was building a house. I came across a problem I couldn't solve. There was nobody around to help me solve it. So I decided, "I'm going to pray." Well, it didn't come very easily. That night I went to bed and in the night I had a dream. In that dream I had the answer to the dilemma of the building problem that I had. And I think that God answered my prayer in my dream. So God answers us, God speaks to us in a variety and wonderful **sorts** of ways. So we can pray for ourselves and it's okay.

And then I think we pray for the world, that God's light will touch everywhere in the world. Wouldn't it be nice if there were no hungry people in the world today? That would be pretty neat wouldn't it? Or no one without clean water. Every single human being could have a nice **fresh** glass of water.

Well Jesus went alone to pray and my guess is that he was **thanking** God. He was interceding for other people. He was praying for himself and he was asking God to heal the world...just the kind of prayers that God invites us to pray. Thanks.

SERMON

I really hope I don't bore you with Mark. It is one of my favorite books and I think there is so much there for **us** to learn if we can look at it critically, but not lose sight of its devotional value as well. Sometimes that's hard to do when we think in terms of critical exegesis, that is, critical interpretation of the Scripture. We **kind** of want to tear the story apart. We begin to look for its inconsistencies. We try to determine where the mistakes might have been made. We can do all of that, but we still have to look underneath it to its devotional value. What is the power that's under the story. To think of the Book of **Mark** like that for me is extremely exciting.

So what is the dynamic in the text this morning that Marilyn read for us that really helps us devotionally? I'll unpack it a little bit intellectually, I hope. Exegesis in terms of your understanding of where it comes **from**. But what about the devotion?

My sense of it is that Jesus is struggling with the very things that you and I struggle with every single day.....the inside person and the outside person. That person who wants to be invested and involved and active in the life of other people and a person who wants to run away and hide and find a garden, so to speak, to pray.

Some of us lean a little bit more toward the monastic. I'm kind of a loner. You might not know that about me, but I like my alone time. It's important to me. It replenishes me. It recharges me. It's not that I don't like people. I do. And I especially like you. People work can be really tiring. Teachers in the room, when you're with kids all day, sometimes you just come away depleted. Often times, when I was a hospital chaplain I'd

have to go to my office before I left for home because I was just so weary that I needed to recharge a little bit. Sometimes I needed to debrief. Sometimes, you know, **after** you watch four or five people die in eight hours, you are pretty wrung out. And I remember once coming home and telling my wife a particularly gory story about the emergency room and she looked at me and said, "Russ, don't bring your pain home. Our family doesn't need it." I felt like she really slapped me in the face. But I began to understand that somehow I needed to recharge because the rest of the world didn't need to carry my pain.

What I hear in this story in Mark is Jesus living in the tension of being a human being, a caring, loving individual who needed both to be giving, teaching and healing but also needed to take care of that other side of him. Now what does that say to you and me? How well do we take care of ourselves on either side? Can we live with that tension or do we get **confused** and perplexed and kind of play to our weaknesses **and/or** our strengths?

I think the entire Book of Mark, **from** the first chapter through to the end, is a depiction of Jesus' struggle between his public self and his private self. And so you watch this tension moving in and out all the **time**.

I want to suggest that the writer of the Book of Mark is trying to create for us a **midrash**, a story that comes out of Old Testament context but is designed especially to encourage people who are living in the dispersia not to lose sight of the God that calls them to righteous living. John the Baptist, at the very early part of this chapter, in the First Testament could be likened to the Old Testament prophet, **Elijah**. Now, you may not know first and second Kings well enough to remember those stories, but I do.

Do you know how **Elijah** was clothed and what he ate and where he lived? Well, if you read the first verses of Mark, you have an exact replica of **Elijah**. He lived in the wilderness, **he ate** locusts and honey and he wore camel skin just like John the Baptist. **Elijah's** career was really one of pointing to the second prophet of that period of time, a **fellow** by the name of **Elisha**.

Elijah did some interesting miracles but **Elisha** was called to do twice as much as **Elijah** did. What was John's witness of Jesus? The one who comes after me will be more **powerful** than I. Think of it. I think the writer of Mark is trying to help us understand something very **important** about Biblical story. **Elisha** became **Elijah's** successor and he was endowed with a double portion of **Elijah's** spirit or presence.

It's interesting if we go back to the Old Testament, that First Testament, we'll understand that **Elisha**, Joshua and Jesus, all three of those names, have identical meanings. God is salvation. Joshua in the Old Testament was the person after Moses who led the people into the Promised Land. Now, what kind of parallels does that have? Jesus and Joshua... (Jesus is kind of the Greek derivative of Joshua)...it's derived **from** the Hebrew root, Yaweh, or God is salvation.

Elisha is derived from the Hebrew root word...it's a generic word...**Elohim**, for the Hebrew word again for God is salvation. You see the writer of Mark had a key understanding of the language and he **frames** these people in a very particular context. In the writer's mind, this dynamic duo, **Elijah** and **Elisha**, set the stage for restoration of **the** kingdom of Israel. It seems to me that the writer of Mark is saying that this guy, John **the** Baptist and Jesus set the stage for the restoration of Israel.

Remember from my comments last week that Israel was in the dispersia. It had lost its place in the world of kingdoms. And Jesus, and particularly the writer of Mark, was trying to reclaim, to call Israel back into its sense of being God's people.

So Mark is trying in his writing to catapult Jesus in his writing into the role of prophet, teacher and healer. But Jesus resists. And that's an interesting thing about the Book. **And** I think it's why Jesus is always saying to the demons, "Don't tell anybody who I am." In fact, he says that to his disciples too. "**Don't** talk about me because I am not **really** doing what you think I'm doing. I am not really **working** at the physical **restoration** of the Kingdom. I am not coming as a political ruler or leader. I am not coming to this place to restore Israel in its former glory, the glory that Solomon and David had. I am coming to teach and to make the Kingdom come alive in the hearts and **the** minds of believers everywhere." That's the thrust of Mark.

In a sense, Jesus gives in to the miracle. The miracles call our attention, don't they? If I **was** able to bring somebody in here who was on a bed and I could raise them up and they could walk and dance, you'd be impressed, wouldn't you? That would raise your **eyebrows**. You would probably walk out of here and say, "What's going on with that **guy**?" **And** you'd probably even go down the street and say, "You know what happened in church this morning?"

Jesus didn't really want any of that. What he really wanted was for people to change. Jesus didn't come to be the **SUPER DOCTOR**, to empty the hospital. Jesus came to help us understand, **GOD WITH US**. And every once in awhile, he gave us a glimpse of **God's** presence in him.

Jesus once said, "Greater things shall you do because I go to the Father." Greater things. God in us. What Jesus was really suggesting here, the writer of Mark, is that we could be **recharged**, that we can be imbued with his power from on high and the very things that God did in Jesus are **possible** in us.

That's not to make magic. That's not for me to run around and be the healer...to take all of your warts away. That's not what it's about. It's about **GOD IN US**, the **HOPE OF GLORY**, to be recharged as it were, with **GOD'S PRESENCE**, **GOD'S BEING IN US**. **Until** we honor that, until we begin to accept it about ourselves and each other, we miss die point and our light doesn't shine very brightly in the world.

But when we as the people of God recognize that the light of God exists in us, then we have the power to transform and God is actively involved in us. The tension always

exists, doesn't it? That tension described by Mark. Do I want to get caught up in all of ~~the~~ physical, all the public, all of the temporal kinds of things, or do I hide out?

My guess is that it has to be a combination of both of them. That we have to be actively **involved** in transforming the world in the same moments that we look seriously and deeply into our own sense of being and find the Jesus that transforms us, that charges us and helps us to become.

Oh, that we could take the text and hear it for what the writer intended, not to take away ~~the~~ tension, but to be aware of the struggle that God calls us and invites us into as we become God's people. Amen.