

“Everyone Is Looking for You”
Mark 1:37b-39

February 5, 2012
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

“Everyone is looking 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 all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons. (Mk 1:37b-39)

Mark paints for us a frantic scene. People are coming out to see Jesus in droves. Think of the lines at Best Buy when DS 3D came out in aqua blue or cosmos black. Think of the frenzy on Black Friday for the early morning sales. Everyone is waiting for the door to open, their bodies are pressing forward in one mass. People are there because they want something and they want it bad. And best of all...what they are about to get is free! But this isn't an early morning shopping spree. Instead the masses wait until evening. Out of respect for the Sabbath Jesus gets a reprieve. The only one to get at Jesus on this day of rest is the mother-in-law of Simon Peter who is relieved of a fever. Then the sun goes down. The Sabbath is over and the people come out to him again in droves. Mark tells us, “That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door.”

“The whole city was gathered together at the door.” Can you imagine the commotion at the door? All in a day's work, right? Finally this commotion comes to an end. Twilight becomes evening and evening becomes midnight and the people at some point go home. The next morning the sun comes up and the people are back at the door again. But Jesus is no where's to be found. He's gone off to a solitary place to pray. It was his AM spiritual work out! It was his breakfast of champions! He needed to talk to his father. But everyone else wanted to visit with him.

This leaves Simon and the other disciples in a pickle. Where is Jesus? The people are there again at his mother-in-law's house. They are pressing against his door. But Jesus is nowhere to be found! The disciples cannot give these people what they want. So off they go in search of Jesus. When they find Jesus they seem befuddled that Jesus has gone off like this. Perhaps the expanded conversation went like this: “Where have you been? Everyone is looking for you. Don't you understand the need? Don't you see how important it is for you to respond to these needs?” And Jesus said, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.”

EVERYONE IS LOOKING FOR YOU

Have you ever been in a similar situation? Have you ever been in a situation where everyone is looking for you? Maybe you went away for a while only to return and find a pile of work waiting for you? And all of it is urgent—demanding your immediate attention. If you are gone on a business trip for several days no one sneaks into your office and sorts your messages for you. When you return those phone calls you'll find that someone has been looking for you. If you go on a vacation for a period of time, when you get back there are bills to pay, snow to shovel, or in happier times, grass to mow. Then too there is the unpacking. It is nice to get a way. It is good to get away. But you pay a price when you return.

It is in times like these that it is every so important to sort the urgent from the important. In fact, it doesn't matter if you've just come back from a business trip, or a vacation. At any time in your life, when you are in the midst of a frantic fray, you need to sort the urgent from the important. The urgent is what is pressing at your door. The urgent is what is demanding your immediate attention. The urgent is an agenda set by others with their own interests and needs. But the important is what matters to you and not in a selfish way, but what matters to you in the end, what matters to you with regards to your eternal destination. We are heavenward bound in Christ. Therefore what matters most....what is most important...is that we nurture our relationship with Christ in word and prayer. What matters most is that we stay in an ongoing conversation with our Lord--Him to us through His Word and we to Him through prayer. When we nurture that relationship through Word and prayer then we are empowered to serve others and live our life to the full.

Think about it. If all you do is attend to the urgent and forget what is important, you'll find that you'll grow weary. Health experts tell us this all the time. If all you do is work, but get no rest, you'll wear yourself out. If all you do is chase down appointments, but don't make an appointment with the doctor, or go for that long walk with your mate, you'll find your relationships deteriorate and so too your health. You must receive in order to give. You must be given power in order to have the strength. You must be loved in order to love. And you are loved, above all, by God. Your strength comes from Him. What you give to others is what you have first received from God—mercy and grace, material blessings, and most of all love.

Jesus knew the distinction between what is urgent and what is important. He knew that his priority was to spend time in prayer with His Father and then to be about the business of preaching the good news in all the towns and villages. He would do miracles. He would have compassion on those in their great, urgent need, but he knew he was sent not just to do miracles, but to give his life for us all and open up the grave to eternal life. And this is the greatest miracle of all!

WHAT'S IMPORTANT

I wonder if those waiting at the door would have taken offense at our Lord's words. After all they were waiting on him. They were looking for him for this very reason, to be healed of their various sicknesses and diseases. I wonder too if we don't take offense when Jesus gives us his word and promise but does not give us the healing that we urgently need. All that mass of humanity that was pressing up against Simon's mother-in-law's door were left to their own designs that day. They were left still in their suffering so that Jesus might move on and preach the gospel in other towns and villages. Sometime we feel that Jesus has left us behind too.

But is that all we want from Jesus? Is that all we need from Jesus? If we get our miracle are we then content? Will we not become sick again and eventually die? What if Jesus solves one problem for us will there not be other problems on the horizon? What if Jesus did raise Lazarus from the dead? Did not Lazarus have to die a second time? No. Jesus came to put an end to this. He came to deal not just with the symptoms but the very disease. He wasn't just going to chip away at the tip of the iceberg. He was going to remove the whole thing. This He would do by giving us life for us all as the supreme sacrifice for sin. Then by rising again on the third day he would open to us the way over everlasting life. All who believe and are baptized into his name receive this hope and blessing.

What we need to understand too, is that prayer is not simply a forum where we make our demands upon God's goodness. Prayer isn't like the reading of a grocery list of urgent needs. Prayer is an opportunity for us to talk with God. It is time to worship God in thanksgiving and praise as well as bring before the Lord our troubles and sorrows. God wants us to talk to him. And he wants us to listen too. That's why he has given us his word. He wants us to listen to what He has to say to us right now at this very moment in our lives. That why Jesus went to the towns and villages preaching the good news. That is why we are here today in this house of worship. God has something to say to us in the gospel.

This is not to say that God will not grant miracles. He does so daily in our lives. But any healing, any restoration, any demons that may have been cast out in our lives, still do not give the ultimate consolation. Even after a miracle like this we are still left in our sins and we still die. And Jesus came out to deal with this problem above all problems. He came to offer his life for us all. That was the gospel that he preached.

The miracles are the urgent. The prayer and the preaching is the important. We would do well to make this same distinction in our lives. Of course, this is easier said than done. Because of our lack of faith we do get caught up in the urgent. We know that prayer and the preaching of the gospel is the first priority in our lives, but we so get caught up in the urgent needs of everyday life. I mean, wouldn't you want to receive a miracle? Don't you need some help? Some of us are desperate. Some of us are in great need. Look at our prayer list this morning. Take stock of your friends and family members. Are there not physical ailments among us? Do we not suffer the consequences of this fallen world—broken relationships, natural disasters, unemployment, abuse, injustice, and neglect? Have we not cried out to God for deliverance from these things? If Jesus came to our city would we not gather as one city before his house where ever he was staying begging the Lord of creation to touch our bodies?

But Jesus has touched our bodies. He came in our flesh and blood. He is among us today through His Word and Spirit reaching out his hand to touch us and bring us hope and healing. For his Word is a word of power and comfort. His word is a word from God to us today calling us to repent of our sins and believe in the good news.

My dear friends in Christ, today Jesus teaches us the distinction between what is urgent and what is important. When everyone was looking for him to have him heal their bodies, Jesus *went off* to a lonely place to pray to his father and then he *went off* to the other towns and villages to preach the good news. “For this is why I came out,” said Jesus. Prayer and preaching...us talking to God and God talking to us. It is the never ending conversation that first began with God in the garden with Adam and Eve and it is the conversation that continues in our day in age. We talk to God in prayer so that we might sustain our relationship with Him. We listen to God in His Word so that He might sustain His relationship with us.

Let us pray: Almighty God, I thank you for the privilege of calling you, our father who art in heaven. Teach us one again this day to receive the greatest gifts—the most important gifts—you have to give—forgiveness, life and salvation. Teach us also that in times of distress when our troubles grow large, that we may come to you again and again, not just with our requests, but also in faith trusting in your mercy through all things. Remind us in such times of your great promises for they are the one thing needful that will never be taken away from us. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

--Pastor Bernie Worrall