

"Pressing Needs and Long-Range Goals"

Mark 1:29-39, Epiphany 5-B, February 8, 2015

Certainly more than one Christian author has suggested in the past 25 years that Jesus would have made a great CEO (Chief Executive Officer)! Why? Because he had those two priceless qualities required of any great leader! **He knew how to respond to immediate needs while never forgetting or being distracted away from his long-range goals.** And certainly we can see this principle at work in our Gospel lesson today in **Mark 1:29-39.**

1. The Press of Immediate Needs.

We all know the importance of responding to immediate needs! If your toe is bleeding, you don't stop to eat lunch before you bandage up your toe and stop the flow of blood! And just think of how many people's different professions represented here this morning **probably also have some immediate needs of their client attached to them!**

If you call a fire station in the middle of the night because your house is on fire, you don't expect the fire station to tell you: "Take two aspirin and call me in the morning!"

What kind of plumber doesn't respond to an emergency phone call when someone's hot-water heater has just burst in their attic and their whole plumber is being flooded with water?

I was visiting my brother this past week in Florida who recently retired after working as a **dentist for 40 years.** He told me that he always gave his patients his home telephone number in case an abscessed tooth or any other type of dental emergency might arise, they'd know how to get in touch with him, so he could help them immediately!

Jesus also knew what it meant to respond to peoples' immediate needs. We heard last Sunday that while Jesus was preaching the good news of the kingdom of God in the synagogue at Capernaum and everyone was sitting on the edge of their seats, listening intently to everything our Lord had to say, because he preached as *"one who had authority and not as the scribes"* (v. 22), this is when a demon-possessed man stood up and called out to our Lord: **"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth! Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God" (v. 24)!**

Jesus cast all the demons out of that man and then we read in **verse 28:** **"At once his fame spread throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee!"**

After the service was over, Jesus, James and John all accepted Simon Peter's and Andrew's invitations to join them for a great Sabbath Day dinner at Peter's home; the kind of Sabbath Day dinner you may have enjoyed with your family while growing up, or the same kind of Sabbath Day dinner you may still enjoy with family members today!

But no sooner does Jesus and his disciples walk through the front door of Peter's home when the announcement is made to them that Peter's mother-in-law was "was down and sick in the bed" (as we sometimes still say in the South) **with a fever.**

The practical side of all this meant for Andrew, Simon Peter and their guests that there would probably be no great Sabbath Day dinner. But **FORTUNATELY JESUS WAS THERE!** And St. Mark tells us: ***"Jesus came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them!"*** (v. 31)

That's **an interesting verb**, that verb **"he lifted her up,"** the same verb that the Bible uses to speak about Jesus' lifting us up out of our spiritual death and filling us with new life; his life as he brings us up out of our spiritual death into a very close and personal relationship with his Heavenly Father!

For Peter's guests—this meant that a great Sabbath Day dinner was suddenly in the realm of possibilities again!

"And she began to serve them," we read. And I am sure it wasn't due to any outside coercion on the part of anyone towards Peter's mother-in-law. She must have loved to do things for other people the way that so many of the good ladies here at Mount Olive Church love to do good things for their Lord and for other people too!

But no sooner are the dishes cleared from the table following that meal when suddenly Andrew's and Peter's home is now being converted into one of those **URGENT CARE FACILITIES**—like we have available to us today, all throughout the greater Columbia metropolitan area!

So one after another they come—the **fevered, the infected, the insane, the possessed, the crippled and the hemorrhaging!** The press of immediate needs were certainly confronting our Lord! We read in verse 32, *"That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons.*

And the whole city gathered together at 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!

2. Long-Range Goals.

But let me tell you brothers and sisters, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ never lost sight of his long-range goals, that of his coming into this world to save us from our sins and to reconcile us to his Heavenly Father, bringing us the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation!

Jesus' long-range goals were not only to convince people in this world that he was indeed the long-awaited Savior of the world; the Promised Messiah, but he also had to teach them about the true nature of what it meant for him to be the Savior of the world. Jesus was **not born into this world simply to overthrow the rule of the Roman Empire that had invaded and occupied their precious land. He had come in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy to be our **"Suffering Servant"** (Isaiah 53). He is the One whom **"God made to be sin for us, who knew no sin, so that through him we might become the righteousness of God!" (2 Corinthians 5:21).****

And Jesus knew that he only had that **very short time period of three years** to accomplish all of this as the window of opportunity that was open to him!

3. How Do We Keep Focused on our Long-Range Goals?

We read in verse 35: ***"And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed!"***

Long before it was dawn, Jesus was up and off to a lonely place to pray and meditate on his Father's will for his life! In the quiet and the solitude he was renewed. He was able to maintain the steady course of his mission. While the sunrise was barely lighting up the eastern sky, Jesus was able to balance the pressing needs surrounding him with the long-range goals of our redemption by prayer and meditation! **Jesus never allowed other people to dictate his personal time schedule or agenda!** He said it again and again: ***"I have not come to do my will but the will of him who sent me! The words that I speak o you are not my words, but the words of him who sent me!"***

4. This is Good News for Us!

And certainly this is good news for us! Because Jesus did fulfill the Father's will for his life and if he hadn't then there is no way that you and I would all be meeting here together again today for yet another Sunday!

But did you notice how Peter was trying to determine our Lord's time schedule for him? *"And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, 'Everyone is looking for you!' And Jesus said to them, **"LET US GO ON TO THE NEXT TOWNS THAT I MAY PREACH THERE ALSO, FOR THAT IS WHY I CAME OUT!"** (v. 38)*

One thing is clear: Our Lord wants us to be involved with him in the work that he sets before us to do. And **despite the disciples erring attempts to drag our Lord off course, he did not reject them.**

Instead, he urged them to continue with him in his mission! They were to go with him throughout his time on earth, and one day he would continue to preach his Good News to the world and heal others through them!

Isn't it important for us also to take out time to worship, for prayer, for meditation and self-reflection! The great Christian psychologist **M. Scott Peck** once wrote that when we get so busy "doing" all the time that we never take any time for "being" and spending time with our Lord in prayer—**this is when leaders become the most vulnerable to making costly mistakes that can easily undo all of their hard work, blood, sweat and tears they have invested in their respective careers up to that time!** One of the biggest lessons I have learned as a pastor is the need for me to stay focused on my long-range goals, not only for my own ministry, but to help this congregation also see the need for our church to stay focused on our long-range goals as well! As we think of our continued use of the resources that God sets before us is our number one goal to be respondent to our Lord's Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)?

St. Paul took out time for prayer and meditation to stay focused on his long-range goal, the **goal of saving souls!** *"I have become all thing to all people that by all means I might save some! I do it all for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings!"* And Paul says we also should seek to do this fervently and whole-heartedly: *"Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it!"* (I Corinthians 9:24)

There is something about “waiting on the Lord” that can totally renew a person’s vitality and strength. And isn’t this what Isaiah is telling us in the Old Testament lesson today? There are times when everyone can become exhausted; not just physically exhausted and mentally drained, but spiritually depleted too!

The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be wear; they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:27-40).

To wait on the Lord does not mean to sit home when such opportunities are available to us and to simply twiddle our thumbs! Shortly before our Lord Jesus ascended into heaven 40 days after his glorious resurrection from the dead, he told his disciples to go back to Jerusalem and to wait there because very shortly they would be clothed with powers, his power from on high—in an even greater bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon them! This doesn’t mean that they just went back to Jerusalem and twiddled their thumbs!

No, for we read in **Acts 1:12-14**: *“Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives! They went up to the Upper Room where they were staying, and all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his apostles!”* Amen