

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

*February 7, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin*

## **Commentary on Mark 1:29-39** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

This passage contains one of the few references to the family life of the disciples. After mentioning "Simon's mother-in-law", the reader is given no further information about Simon's wife or if he had children. Like a stone thrown into the water, the healing story ripples out from Simon's mother-in-law, to the neighbors outside the door of the house, and finally throughout region of Galilee. Mark makes a connection between healing, casting out demons, and proclamation. Ultimately healing is associated with repentance and believing in the power of God at hand. This is reinforced when Jesus goes off by himself to spend time with the Divine Trinity. It is within the mystery of the Trinity that the church has historically understood Jesus praying.

Mark 1:35 "he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed."

Does it surprise you that Jesus prayed? Was he praying to himself?

What does this say about the nature of humanity?

If Jesus really was tempted, then wouldn't he need to rely on the strength of the Holy Spirit?

If Jesus prayed, is there there any excuse not to pray?

When was the last time you went to a deserted place to pray?

## **Commentary on Isaiah 40:21-31** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Shifting from the judgment of Judah in the first section of Isaiah, Chapter 35/40 shifts to offering hope to the captives in Babylon. (Note: Chapters 36-39 of Isaiah is simply a historical flashback of 2 Kings 18:13-20:19) The captives were unsure of their future or if God was still on their side. These passages assured the people that God is greater than any nation or people. All true power comes from God and when the time is right God will empower the captives to return home. All that God expects is that they faithfully wait. Even during times of powerlessness and weakness, they are to find strength in their faith. Later Christians would see that promise fulfilled in the good news proclaimed by Jesus.

Isaiah 40:29 "He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless."

When have you found this passage to be true in your life?

If you haven't been given strength, is it because you didn't ask?

Does God sometimes expect more from us than we do?

Is it only when we have finally given up that we are then ready for God's help?

When was the last time you asked for help?

## **Commentary on 1 Corinthians 9:16-23** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

How should the apostles be treated? This was a growing concern for the early church as it began to grow. In some religions, priests and prophets were paid for their services. If a follower could not pay, the prophet or priest would withhold a blessing or a fortune. Within the Jewish faith, priests were set apart and could not engage in certain activities or risk becoming unclean. In chapter 9, Paul argues that to be a Christian means to be a servant to the Word. The early meaning of Christian was "slave of Christ" which is symbolized today in the servant collar worn by certain members of the clergy. Paul is continuing the example of servant leadership set forth in the Gospel of John. By arguing that proclamation is an obligation free of charge, he is directly addressing many Greek and Roman forms of worship. The discussion about being all things to all people addresses the "cleanliness" of Jewish leaders. For Paul, the office of Christian leader is always in service to the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:18 "What then is my reward?"

Do some Christians view the resurrection as a reward?

Do we expect prosperity and abundance if we follow Christ?

Are we judging God by the world's standards of risk and reward?

What if following Christ is not for a reward but rather who we were created to be?

Maybe proclaiming the good news for a Christian is like giving off heat for a flame?

What if our true joy comes from God's joy at having all God's children come home?

### Sermon "**Renew your Calling**" (*Sermon Video*)

The longer I am in ministry, the more vital I find the role of prayer. Since God is the source of our strength and our calling, it is in prayer that we directed and equipped to follow God's will. The three scriptures today can be viewed through the light of prayer. The most difficult to find this connection is Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

In an attempt to explain his actions, Paul describes the obligation to proclaim the gospel as compelling him to be all things to all people. But how can anyone be all things to all people in an authentic manner? Politicians often pretend to understand everyone but their actions of time often prove hypocritical. If even masters of deception find it hard to be all things to all people, how can people follow the advice of Paul? Where is God's word in this selection of Paul's letter?

If it was up to Paul's strength and ability, he would have failed and yet his missionary trips spread the gospel throughout the Mediterranean. It is only by the grace of God that we are able to enter into someone's world with authenticity. First, in prayer God calls us to go to certain individuals, communities, and situations. Whom God call, God equips. In prayer our view of the world expands so that we can begin to see the world through the eyes of those we are called to proclaim the gospel. This may be challenging and at times uncomfortable but necessary if we are to proclaim an authentic message of salvation. Before we can offer Christ's word of hope, we have to understand their hopelessness and what is enslaving them. It is also through prayer that we are given the strength of faith to face their situation and not fall into the same prison that they are in.

Once we enter that situation, we are able to proclaim a message of hope just as Isaiah proclaimed to the exiles in Babylon. Whether those exiles arrived because of the fall of Jerusalem or had been taken earlier and had been living in Babylon for a while, they needed a word of hope. It is when we become hopeless that we stop praying and waiting on the Lord. And yet it is when we are the most vulnerable and at our weakest that we need God's strength the most.

Jesus had preach with authority, cast out demons, and healed all in one day and yet early the next morning, before sunrise, Jesus went to pray. Jesus' authority and strength to carry out his mission of compassion came from his intimate relationship in the Trinity. In prayer, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit became whole and one again. It is in prayer that our will realigns with the Father's will. It is in prayer that we begin to "put on the mind of Christ" and see the world through Jesus' eyes. And it is in prayer that our weak and wounded spirit finds healing and wholeness in the Holy Spirit.

The longer I am in ministry, the more important true prayer becomes. Prayer is not a laundry list of desires and complaints. Nor is prayer a set of words before a meal or a pattern based on A.C.T.S (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication). True prayer is resting in the presence of God. In that presences we share all our hopes and dreams as well as all of our trials and disappointments. Not because we want answers but because that is what we do when we truly love someone. We also listen to God's hopes and dreams for us and all of God's children. Our heart grows more compassionate and we walk a little closer in step with Jesus. In the end, our love and our strength is renewed with an assurance that no matter what God is with us and will always be there no matter what. Like Paul, may we share this treasure to those who need their strength renewed like eagle's wings.