

Wherever Jesus went, he brought new life. Wherever He went, he brought the Kingdom of God with Him. The old order of things was passing away. The demons couldn't stick around because their conqueror had shown up. Sickness and disease couldn't stick around because Jesus brought healing and wholeness. Jesus was obviously no ordinary man. He was nothing less than God-in-the-flesh, coming on the scene to reclaim His creation. What an awesome thought. But it's not really our focus today. The thing that I want us to ponder today is almost like an afterthought in today's Gospel. It is easy to miss, especially when you've got miraculous healings and exorcisms taking place. Mark tells us that after a tremendously busy day, Jesus got up early in the morning and went off by himself to pray. That's what I want us to consider, and it's a simple thing, really. Jesus routinely made time to pray. He created the time to communicate with His Father. If he needed to, how much more do we need to?

We know this, and yet I think many Christians struggle with prayer. I would be lying if I said that I never had any troubles with prayer. My prayer life seems to go in spurts. Sometimes it is great, and then, there are times that I just...don't. If you aren't satisfied with yourself when it comes to prayer, today's message is for you. May the example of Jesus inspire you to regular prayer and heartfelt communication with Him and our Heavenly Father, guided by the Holy Spirit.

Isn't it intriguing that Jesus, in his humanity, valued prayer so highly? More than a good habit, it was a deep need for him. He was willing to set other things aside for a while, so that he could pray. In fact, his disciples break the silence by finding him and telling him, "Everyone is looking for you."

The implications for you and me are probably obvious. So often we fall into the trap of being "too busy to pray." We assume that there are better, more practical ways of using our time. Maybe we don't believe that prayer is going to make any difference, so we don't do it. Or, we paralyze our prayers by thinking they've got to be done in just the right, precise way or they won't work. Whatever the reason, Jesus' example puts us to shame. That is, of course, because Jesus' motives for prayer were one hundred percent pure. He simply needed to talk to Dad.

The idea of prayer as an expression of a relationship with God can be very helpful once it is understood. For example, if someone you like or even love stops talking to you, what does that mean? It means something's wrong. It is never a good sign. On the other hand, we all have people that we enjoy talking to, because we know they will listen and understand our viewpoint. It is never a good sign when we find ourselves giving God the cold shoulder through a lack of prayer. It is a symptom of a deeper spiritual problem. Again, if you stop talking to someone, what are you saying?

Here's the good news: If it's been a while, you have a standing invitation to get back on speaking terms with God. We have an advocate with the Father—His Son, our Lord Jesus. God's Word promises that when we can't think of the words to say, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us—the

Spirit interprets our thoughts and feelings so they come out right before the throne of God. Furthermore, you can talk to a God who understands—a God who knows what it means to suffer, to hurt, to be lonely, to be scared—a God who’s been there, right where you are now.

How do we know this? Much later in Mark’s gospel, we find Jesus in prayer again, and it’s the most intense prayer he ever prayed. He’s in the garden of Gethsemane. It’s the night before he dies. He knows what’s about to happen. Mark tells us he felt distressed and anguished. And this is his prayer: “Abba! Father! You can do anything. Take this cup of suffering away from me. But let your will be done rather than mine.” Now, this deserves a sermon of its own. Jesus gives us a Master’s Class in prayer here. But I bring it up now to drive home the point: you do not have a distant God. Jesus felt pain, sorrow, anger, He could be deeply troubled. So He knows what you’re talking about when you bring your troubles to Him. And look at Jesus’ example. His distress and anguish does not drive him away from his Father—those things drive Him to his Father in prayer. It was this same impulse that led a man named Joseph Scriven to write: “Oh, what peace we often forfeit/Oh, what needless pain we bear/All because we do not carry/everything to God in prayer.”

You’ve probably heard stories (like the “Drama in Real Life” series in Reader’s Digest) of people being rescued from injury or death by total strangers—and often the person who was rescued has an urgent desire to meet their rescuer again and talk to them and say “thank you.” Wouldn’t you like to talk to the person responsible for rescuing you? Don’t you have something to say to the One who saved your life for eternity?

“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, [Jesus] departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.” Do whatever you have to do to find your own desolate place of prayer, so you can be refreshed in holy conversation with your loving Father.

February 4, 2018 + Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

St. Mark Lutheran Church, Chesterland, Ohio

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