

Feb. 7, 2021 Epiphany 5

Mark 1:29-39

Resetting, Refreshing and Renewing Mission

Have you ever had one of those days where life seems to come at you faster than you can handle? I had one last Friday. We moved into our house almost 18 years ago, and we bought all new appliances when we moved in. That means all our appliances are almost 18 years old. That also means they are all starting to break at the same time. Last week it was the dishwasher. So we shopped around and found what we wanted and had it delivered. The company we bought it from offered to install it for \$169, but I had helped one of our former members (Bill Shaw) put the old one in and I didn't remember it being very difficult, so I decided to save the \$169 and do it myself. That's where the problem started. I turned off the circuit breaker to the dishwasher and shut off the water under the sink that runs to the old dishwasher only to discover the shut off valve was broken. So I took that off, found it full of gunk, and went to the hardware store to buy a new one. I put that on without a problem and turned the water back on and we had water...for about 5 seconds. Then everything shut off. After an hour or so of messing around and trying to figure out what was wrong, I discovered that some of that gunk from the old shut off valve had shot up into the faucet and clogged it up. So we fixed that. Somewhere in there, I discovered that when I shut off the breaker for the dishwasher, I had also turned off the refrigerator. So we loaded the food into coolers and put it out in the garage to stay cold. Back to work on the dishwasher. The electrical box on the new dishwasher was in the front where the old one was in the back, so where I had plenty of electrical cord for hooking up the old one, the new one only worked if I could slide the new dishwasher all the way in, snake the cord up to the front and then connect the wires to the electrical box. Brenda was trying to help, but I was well past grouchy at this point, so she went and hiding the basement. Finally, with Ben's help, we got everything hooked up and ran a load of dishes and everything went great...until the little computer panel started flashing an error message. I got out the manual and found the codes. The error was telling me that there was a leak. At that point, I said that's it for today. I have to

step away. I'm grouchy. I'm losing my temper. I've reached my limit. I've used my whole day off on this. My hip and shoulder are killing me from laying on the tile floor. I'll deal with this later. So I turned off the water and power again and let it sit while I got refreshed and reset and renewed for a day.

And I began to ponder the fact that often, it feels like we are no longer living the lives we have, but rather barely dealing with life as it comes *at* us.

At this point we encounter today's text in Mark's Gospel. It is "a day in the life" kind of story, and Jesus is the central figure. Within just a few verses, He bounces from need-to-need and place-to-place. The diary of his day could not be more jam-packed, even if he were a politician giving a stump speech at every whistle-stop. First, there's a high-profile synagogue situation; and that's followed by a personal encounter with a sick woman at her bedside; and that's followed by the private experience of prayer as Jesus steps aside for time alone with God. But then the disciples interrupt--actually, the word means *hunted him down*--and the cycle reboots all over again.

It is a hectic itinerary. But maybe that's why it is in the Bible. This trio of stories...one public, one personal, and one private...each invites us to eavesdrop on Jesus' spirituality...how He lived and the faith He practiced among the demands of an overwhelming world.

In many ways when we hear this story of Jesus, we are hearing the church's story. We try to meet needs, deal with various aspects of mission...while at the same time tend to our own spirituality which has drawn us to Jesus in the first place...that beautiful intersection of being and doing.

There are two points I want to bring out from this story. **First, if you live your life as a caring person, there will be pressure and tough choices.** It happened to Jesus. It will happen to you. Don't be surprised. Spiritual maturity rarely is applauded for long.

I was thinking of these words first as a pastor. I preach and lead worship and Bible class. I hear your stories—all that you are going through and try to speak comfort to them. I attend committee meetings, and I talk with the homeless guy that is back again. Then there's the mid-afternoon hospital visit before another meeting, all the while trying to tend to my own relationship with Jesus.

But it is not more so than being a parent. Between work and the kids' school and home management, life comes *at* you. For most, that is the landscape, and some terrains can't be changed, but they can be accepted. That's number one.

Here's number two: though we can't stop life coming *at* us, we can attend to the life that is given us. This means attending to our relationship with God.

I don't want to get off on a rant here, but I never have liked the Apostle Paul's statement: "I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some (I Corinthians 9:22)." I affirm his honorable intention, as well as the noble need; but by Sunday night, it sounds like a grandiose recipe for burn-out.

I much prefer the punch-line of today's Hebrew Bible lectionary text. The poet/prophet Isaiah sings out:

*Even youths will faint and be weary,
And the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.*

I suspect that is what Jesus was up to as he sequestered himself in a deserted place to pray. Perhaps by tending his prayer life, he found perspective above the fray...almost like the wings of an eagle, looking over the woes and foes of life.

The story ends with Jesus not following the advice of his wranglers. They had tracked him down, saying, "Everyone's looking for you!"

What a hook! If Jesus had not gotten his praying done, I wonder if the allure of pursuit or the price of fame could have done him in.

To his advisors, Jesus said, "Let's head in the other direction, to nearby villages, so that I can preach there too. That's why I've come." Sounds to me he had the kind of clarity that comes out of one's deepest identity which finds its source and sustenance in God.

So, when life comes *at* you this week, you'll be ready. You've paused, you've pondered, and you've prayed. You may be a tired parent or a tired pastor or both. And, yes, you've had to make tough choices, but you have tough faith. Even before the week begins, you've found a good place to remember: your life is grounded in the goodness of God.