

“Be Still: Knowing and No-ing”
Mark 1:29-39

We continue our focus this week on the call to be still and to know God. Last week we talked about the importance of deep living, of stopping each day from our striving in order to flow with God in the world. Today we will look at the example of Jesus and how he knew the will of God by taking time away from the crowds to pray. (Slide of scripture Mark 1:29-39) I love the story for today because I can relate to it so well. Jesus was at the peak of his ministry. Things were heating up for him. He was teaching, preaching, healing people, changing lives, and turning the world upside down. He had gone into the wilderness and prepared himself for all of this ministry. This seemed to be the time for activity and putting his plans into action. And yet, in the midst of it all, Jesus took time to get away from everyone to be in prayer. I love how the Gospel says that the disciples hunted for him. They searched diligently because he was nowhere they could access him. And then when they finally found him, they said, “Everyone has been searching for you.” In other words, “Don’t you care about all the people that need you?” This normally would have appealed to someone’s ego about being needed. But Jesus was steeped in prayer and so his sense of mission was not driven by the recognition or reception he got from people. Jesus must have practiced the Jewish way of praying at least three times a day. All males over the age of 12 were expected to pray three times a day in addition to the blessing of meals: early in the morning, at 3 pm, and in the evening. Prayer was part of the daily rhythm of life for Jesus. It is also interesting that after his prayer time, Jesus said that they would not go back to work where they were, but they should move to a new area to preach and heal. So, not only did prayer give Jesus the energy he needed to do his ministry, but it also gave him direction.

I am so grateful to have these details about Jesus’ prayer life because they show us that a life of prayer is essential for our ministry and life. One of the first things people often do for the sake of helping others is neglect their prayer life. What ends up happening is that our sense of mission gets separated from our relationship with God. And the culture rewards us for that kind of busyness. People expect us to be busy as a sign of commitment and accomplishment. Even in church, we are often tempted to add more activities and events instead of going deeper to focus on one or two things we do well to fulfill our calling as followers of Jesus Christ, while allowing enough margin in our days to have a vibrant prayer life.

I found an interesting short documentary called “HumanKinda” produced by JetBlue in 2015 to convince people to take time for vacation and relaxation. We will watch a few minutes of it.

<https://youtu.be/qqfuLGgiFHw>

We can relate to this idea of being so busy that it is hard for us to find time to relax or pray. But until we take time to pray and make that a defining habit and rhythm for our days, it is hard for us to say no to all the things and activities that come our way, most of which are good things that help us or help others around us. Saying no to some

activities and things is very important to our health and our ability to be true to our calling in life.

In his book, *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis shares a series of letters written by a senior demon named Screwtape to his nephew, Wormwood, a younger and less experienced demon, who is charged with guiding a man toward evil and away from God. Wormwood wants to take the traditional demonic route of tempting the man to blatant sin. But Screwtape counsels him to move gradually.

“Befuddle and confuse the man. Get him not to be outright evil, but to be passive and irresponsible. Move him just an inch at a time.” He points to the great effectiveness of distracting the man, not by inherently bad things, but with things of lesser value. “Distract him from God. Busy him with other things.”

I know that sounds elementary, but it is one of the greatest struggles for our faith. Having a vibrant and active prayer life is an essential foundation for all of our lives, decisions, and actions. There is nothing more powerful than a life guided by a rhythm of prayer. Instead of seeing prayer as an additional part of life, we have to trust God’s wisdom that prayer is the foundation upon which all of life is built. If Jesus believed and practiced this, there is no greater wisdom for us to follow.

Here are the words of someone who discovered the power of living by the rhythm of prayer and inner peace. This is a woman battling the chaos of cancer treatment who wrote of her experience in this way: “Suddenly I found myself swept up in the storm of the vast waves of the medical ocean. Up and down. Tossed and blown. Surgery now. Chemotherapy later. Try this. No, try this. That’s better. Or is it? CT Scan doesn’t look good. Try this. IVs. Lab work. More tests. More needles. More LIFE? Maybe. X-rays. More chemo. Experimental drugs. Nausea. No. No more... Early on in my illness a friend gave me a book that has given me hope. It’s entitled, *The Triumphant Patient*, by Greg Anderson. I rehearse the ‘Triumphant Patient’s Creed’ every day and share it with others. It goes: (Slide with the following words on the screen) ‘Hope reigns in my life today. My illness does not rule me. Daily I seek to acknowledge the physical, be positive in the mental, transcend the emotional, and anchor in the spiritual, knowing that God’s Presence is my goal. Thank you, Lord, for today’s blessings.’ (Wichita Falls Medicine, Nov-Dec., 1996, pp. 25-26)

And so today, I would like to invite you to take a few moments to explore your prayer life and your daily schedule. Is there any correlation between your rhythm of prayer and your daily schedule and activities? Are you willing to examine your relationship to money and spending to see if money is causing you to work more hours than you truly need to? What are you longing for in your prayer life right now? What is preventing you from accomplishing that? What commitments do you need to make to live like Jesus did with a sense of power, mission, and love?

We will end with a time of prayer....Amen.