

Message for Feb. 7, 2021

Mark 1:29-39 and Isaiah 40:21-31

Betty to introduce the hymn

Sing verse 1

Spirit God: be our breath, be our song.

Blow through us, bringing strength to move on.

Our world seems inward, defensive, withdrawn...

Spirit God, be our song.

This gospel seems to be heading off in all directions at once. There is so much happening here. It is the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. When we last read Mark (two weeks ago) Jesus was baptized by John. In the 15 verses since then, John has been arrested and Jesus has picked up his ministry. Just as John "appeared" in the desert, proclaiming repentance, Jesus appeared in Galilee, proclaiming the Good News of God. After this, he takes a walk along the seashore and calls first Simon and Andrew, then James and John. Then he and his disciples go to Capernaum, where they attend worship. In the Synagogue, Jesus teaches with authority. Mark doesn't really waste any time with the narrative. Everything is immediate.

In fact, the word *immediately* is used 58 times by the gospel writers - 41 of those times by Mark. And right from the very beginning. The first time that it appears in Mark, it is translated as straight. *As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold, I send my messenger before you, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of our God, make the path straight [eutheos]."'* (Mark 1:2-3)

The Greek word is *eutheos*. Common meanings of eutheos are at once, immediately, and straight. It can even mean direct, by the straight road, of going straight forward, level ground, right, upright. In regards to time, eutheos does mean immediately or at once. But, eutheos also has an underlying moral meaning – straight, right, upright, level – as

well. In fact, eutheos is a compound word. Eutheos is made of eu, which means good or well, and theo, which means to place. So, in its most literal sense, eutheos means well placed.¹

John is well placed, he wastes no time preparing the way for Jesus. The disciples are well placed, they waste no time following the call of Jesus. Jesus is well placed, to walk alongside us, he wastes no time in sharing the love of God with all. This isn't all happening in a rush. Jesus isn't running from one place to another.

This is immediate to show us the purpose with which Jesus moves, and ministers, the purpose to which he calls us as well. The certainty of which we sing in the next verse of our hymn:

Patient God: soothe our pride, calm our fear.

*Comfort us. When we know you are near
we grow more certain, our vision is clear.*

Patient God, calm our fear.

The Very Revd Dr Derek Browning from Morningside Parish Church, in Edinburgh, says that these ten verses sum up the ministry of Jesus. This is where we see who Jesus is and what he has come to do and be in the world. He heals, and prays, and teaches. He is found wherever we are - where two or three are gathered, in a home, in a crowd, in solitude. God is revealed in the private and public spheres of life. God is not hidden, God is made manifest in actions, and in words; in touch, in silence and in speech.²

Upon leaving the synagogue, Jesus entered Simon's and Andrew's house with James and John. Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told Jesus about her. Jesus went over to her, took her by the hand and helped her up, and the fever left her.

¹ <https://livingroomtheology.com/immediately-used-much-gospel-mark/>

²

https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/73717/7-February-5-After-Epiphany.pdf

What happens here is simple and it is intimate. It takes place in a house, the earliest Christian communities which were house churches, small gatherings of folks sharing in the worship and work. This is a ministry of presence. Jesus doesn't say anything, he takes her by the hand, lifts her up, and the fever leaves her. We often spend much time and energy trying to find the right words when what is needed is simply to show up and hold someone's hand. We have many people suffering from dis-ease in our congregation, are we willing to sit with them and be with them?

Because after this, word gets around. And as the day ends, they bring so many people to Jesus that there is a crowd at the door. So many people in need of the ministry of presence. Let us offer this ourselves, and let us sing our next verse.

*Loving God: be our voice, be our prayer.
Reaching out, joining hands as we share,
We seek your guidance through friendship and care.
Loving God, be our prayer.*

After Jesus sits with Simon's mother-in-law, she gets up and goes about her work. She immediately begins to serve. There are two things that we might notice about this. First, Simon's mother-in-law cannot serve until she is healed. She needs to be cared for. The disciples notice her pain, and Jesus tends to her. Second, it would seem that she is the first to really understand what it means to follow Jesus. And this is to serve. Some might say that she is serving because that is what is expected of her as a woman. The fellows at Pulpit Fiction argue that rather than reinforcing gender roles, this story challenges them. So often in the gospels, the women "get it" before the men. Service is not the "proper place of women" it is the proper place for all Christians.³ To respond with gratitude to the ways that the Holy has touched our lives. Not only that but the word used, makes her the first deacon. The first person to model the love taught and shared by Jesus, helping others through service.

³ <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/epiphany5b>

I would hope that we would look for ways to do likewise, as we sing:

Spirit God: be our breath, be our song.

Blow through us, bringing strength to move on.

Through change, through challenge, we'll greet the new dawn...

Spirit God, be our song.

In our Scripture, Jesus greets the new dawn by retreating in prayer. He seeks solitude. Leaving the city and the demands behind, he goes to be alone. He's put a lot of himself out there, so he goes to a quiet place where he cannot be disturbed. He goes to be with God. Taking time to pray is a good spiritual practice, as is taking time for oneself.

The disciples find him - everyone is looking for you!

My friend put it this way: I think this week's Gospel is funny for the ways the disciples are so panicky to find Jesus, but Jesus just wants 5 minutes of peace and quiet and I don't know any parents of young kids who can relate. Or teenagers. Or anyone with demands on their time or lots on their mind. Like that time I just needed to brush my teeth and by the time I was done, there were two toddlers and a dog in the bathroom with me.

Fortified by prayer, Jesus returns to the busy schedule of His ministry. He is renewed in His vocation. His calling is to bring the presence of God into every situation where people are oppressed by sickness and death, hunger and disability, despair and hopelessness. As one commentator notes, Jesus begins His ministry at home and immediately (Mark's favourite adverb!) extends it beyond the home. He is called out into the world as we all are. It is in our actions and our service that God is revealed and we are well placed to do so. Let us get to it, immediately.

Amen.