

## Discipleship in the Lectionary – 02/04/2024



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

**Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany**

Revised Common Lectionary Year B

Sunday, February 4th

**Mark 1:29-39**

Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

### **Rhythm of ministry: withdraw, renew, reengage**

Even with Mark's breathtaking pace of Jesus' journey to the cross, the rhythm of Jesus' ministry is evident in this text – as it is throughout Mark's entire Gospel. After an eventful day of preaching, teaching, healing and exorcisms, Jesus awakens "*very early in the morning,*" withdraws from His companions and goes to a desolate place to pray. After this experience He reengages with the world and His ministry. Such intentional time of solitude and prayer is a vital component of ministry that Jesus not only practiced but taught His disciples to do the same.

#### Mark 1:29-39 Commentary

The events of this text occur on the same Sabbath in which Jesus heals a man with an unclean Spirit in Capernaum.

*<sup>29</sup> And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. <sup>31</sup> And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.*

The adverb *euthys* (immediately; at once) is a feature of Mark's Gospel and is used to link this text with the prior events (vv.21-28). Mark's account indicates Simon/Peter was married at the time of his call. Simon Peter's wife is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 9:5. Andrew lives in the same house as Simon Peter and thus the residents include a typical extended family. This house appears to be Jesus' home for His Galilean ministry (2:1). At this point only the four men mentioned in the text comprise of Jesus' group of disciples. Simon Peter's mother-in-law has a fever. Like today, this could be a wide range of conditions with varying degrees of severity. The healing is intimate, quiet, and instantaneous. This contrasts the scene of the healing of the man with an unclean spirit.

*<sup>32</sup> That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. <sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered together at the door. <sup>34</sup> And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.*

For the Jews, the new day began at sundown (in this case roughly 6:00 P.M. Saturday) and thus the people waited until the Sabbath was over. News of what had happened earlier in the synagogue had clearly traveled far. The "*whole city was gathered at the door*" is similar hyperbole to John the Baptist when "*...all the country of Judea and*

*all Jerusalem were going out to him..." (1:5). The case of the exorcism in the synagogue (1:20-28) and the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law that described individually are now repeated on a much larger scale.*

*<sup>35</sup> And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.*

How tired must Jesus have been after healing late into the evening? Later in Mark's Gospel we learn how such healings take power from Jesus (5:30). The previous day had been eventful with many healings and exorcisms. Jesus reenergizes by making time to spend alone with the Father. Did Jesus sleep in? No! A critical rhythm of Jesus' ministry is revealed in this text. Jesus withdraws to a desolate place to be alone with God in private prayer. The Greek word *erēmos* means an uninhabited and uncultivated region. Such a place could be a wilderness or a desert. Jesus had to wake very early in the morning so he could withdraw to such a place and be alone. Jesus' recovery was to withdraw in solitude in the wilderness to spend time alone with God.

*<sup>36</sup> And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, <sup>37</sup> and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." <sup>38</sup> And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." <sup>39</sup> And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.*

The fact that Simon Peter and the others had to search for Jesus illustrates He must have gone some distance. Jesus also uses the time alone with the Father to seek guidance for the next steps in His ministry. After withdrawing to spend time with the Father, Jesus then reengages with the world and continues His ministry. Verse 38 clearly reveals how Jesus must have gained clarity about the purpose of His ministry through this withdrawal.

### Reflection and Action

The healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law contrasts significantly from the casting out of the unclean spirit from the man in the Synagogue earlier in the day. The exorcism was public. Jesus spoke in a powerful way. The departing demon caused a ruckus. The healing was private. Jesus took her by the hand. The only sign of the healing was that she began waiting on the guests. There are some similarities too. Both the exorcism and the healing happened instantaneously. Both people made whole either approached Jesus or their plight was made known to Him. Like other examples of healings and exorcisms in Mark, Jesus does not go looking for such, they are brought to Him. The primary purpose of Jesus ministry was the teaching and preaching. The healings and exorcisms were a response to His power and authority.

Both healings occur on the Sabbath. The crowds in the text waited until after the Sabbath was over. This issue of Jesus' right to heal on the Sabbath will be brought up in 3:1-6. If Jesus worked on the Sabbath, He had found the means to obtain Sabbath rest in other ways. Every significant moment in Jesus' ministry is preceded by Jesus withdrawing and spending time in private prayer with God. Even in Mark's Gospel characterized by such a breathless pace, we still see how Jesus prioritizes solitude and silence to commune with the Father. He taught His disciples to do the same:

Jesus' preparation for His ministry involved being tempted alone in the wilderness (1:12-13). We read how Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee (1:16). The example in this week's text of how Jesus got up while it was still dark, withdrew to a desolate place and prayed (1:35). Jesus had to withdraw to desolate places because of his popularity (1:45). On one Sabbath Jesus walked through the grainfields with His disciples (2:23). Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the Sea of Galilee (3:7). Jesus spent the night on a mountain and decided on the twelve apostles (3:13). After Jesus had sent out the twelve and they had

returned, He told them to come away by themselves to a desolate place and rest for a while (6:30). After Jesus had dismissed the crowds, He went up on a mountain to pray (6:46). Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a mountain by themselves (9:2). When Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem, He walked ahead of them in solitude and silence (10:32). Jesus' usual place to pray while in Jerusalem was the Mount of Olives (14:26). Jesus withdraws to Gethsemane taking only Peter, James, and John to pray.

This cycle of withdrawing from the world to spend time alone with God, and then when renewed, to then reengage in ministry is further expanded in the other Gospels. Without such intentional silence and solitude in our lives, we will fail to have intimacy with God. When this happens, our ministries will begin to lack compassion, wisdom, and power. Ultimately such efforts become human-led rather than Spirit-led endeavors characterized by little or no fruit and burnout.

