

place apart: Mark 1.35-45

Today's TFTD from Anna takes me back to the quiet shores of the Sea of Galilee.



“In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.”

This passage has so much in it! It is also the passage we are looking at in our first Lent group (Today at 7:30 or tomorrow at 2:00 on Zoom, more information at <https://www.stphilipandstjames.co.uk/lent>). Throughout Lent, in these weekly groups, we are looking at the encounters people have with Jesus. In this passage, it is the turn of the leper.

Because we are going to look at this later, I feel ok in not focusing on that encounter in this thought-for-the-day but to focus on v 35 because I think, this one verse has a lot to say to us today.

“In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.”

Mark is telling us a fast-paced story of Jesus; we have already had Jesus’ baptism, temptation in the desert, the calling of the first disciples, teaching, exorcism, and healing and we are still in chapter one!! Jesus is quickly making a name for himself, word is beginning to spread about this guy who can heal the sick and teach with authority. People are interested, they are looking for him but Jesus is nowhere to be found.

He has gone away alone to pray. When his disciples find him they exclaim *“Everyone is*

looking for you". All the people, the sick, the possessed — the whole town with all their needs are looking for him. But Jesus doesn't go to them. He says "*Let us go somewhere else — to the nearby villages — so I can preach there also*". He leaves all the people in that town with all their needs to go somewhere else.

Why does he do that? How can he leave all those people who want to know more, who want to be healed? Because, he says, he has come to preach the good news: "*The time has come, the Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news*" (1:15).

Jesus is often surrounded by people all asking for things from him. I wonder if he felt the weight of everyone's problems on his shoulders, I wonder if he wanted to heal everyone but, being just one man, he got tired and overwhelmed. I wonder if he felt it was a job that would never end. He was fully human, with all our human frailties.

So he goes to his source of refreshment, his Father and he talks and listens to him. When he goes away alone to be with his Father he comes back with a renewed vision of what he is actually called to do — to preach the good news in other places also. He then travelled throughout Galilee preaching.

It was on that journey he came upon this particular leper. This leper gets healed because Jesus left the people in Capernaum still looking for him. Is that fair? I don't know, I can't see the big plan but it does tell me that Jesus didn't do everything that people asked and needed from him. And if Jesus didn't we don't have to either.

Jesus didn't let the urgent get in the way of the important, he didn't let others needs dictate what he did. He took time out for himself to recharge and refocus and he did that in prayer with the Father.

You might say, haven't we all been in a forced time-out for almost a year! We don't need any more time alone. But for many, this lockdown has meant that any barrier there was between work and home has gone. Zoom meetings can be called at any time, and your mobile has to be with you always. Kids schooling at home and all the pressures of finding new ways to do all those tasks we just took for granted are taking their toll (as well as the constant fear of the virus). If there has ever been a time when we all need some collective refreshing and renewed vision it is now (and If there has ever been a thought-for-the-day that I am writing for myself it is this one!)

The great contemplatives of the past, point to this weird thing that happens when you decided to focus on spending time with God regularly in prayer, and quiet meditation. When you take time out of a busy day, when you add in this extra meeting, you find you

have much more time in the day and you actually get more done. It isn't magic, but just like Jesus, refocusing on what was really important, what was his actual mission, he stopped letting others dictate what he did and he didn't let the urgent get in the way of the important.

Now I don't think for a moment that Jesus found it easy to leave those people behind, and I don't think those people understood why he did, just like I don't think it is easy for us to take time out when the to-do list is just getting bigger and people are wanting more from us but it is the right thing to do.

The result might mean less stuff gets done, but maybe the stuff that doesn't get done doesn't really need to be done. The result might mean people feel let down, but just like Jesus, leaving one town meant he helped many more people in many different ways because he did.

The result might be that you have a renewed joy in what you are doing because you have refocused on what is important to you not others. The results might be a renewed peace because you leave some of the problems you are carrying with the Father rather than carrying them yourself. The results might be a complete surprise.

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Psalm 23 for Busy People

The Lord is my pace setter... I shall not rush

He makes me stop for quiet intervals

He provides me with images of stillness which restore my serenity.

*He leads me in the way of efficiency through calmness of mind
and his guidance is peace.*

*Even though I have a great many things to accomplish each day,
I will not fret, for his presence is here*

His timelessness, his all importance will keep me in balance.

*He prepares refreshment and renewal in the midst of my activity
by anointing my mind with his oils of tranquillity.*

My cup of joyous energy overflows.

*Truly harmony and effectiveness shall be the fruits of my hours
for I shall walk in the Pace of the Lord and dwell in his house for ever.*

(Toki Miyashina- found in *How to Pray* by John Pritchard — a really good little book on prayer)

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