

Do Our Lives Proclaim God's Kingdom Come?
Based on Mark 1:35-45, David Jahnke, 2/1/15

So we are working our way through Mark. And Jesus had just had an incredibly busy day. He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath and taught and he ended up having to heal a demon-possessed man. After worship, he went to Simon-Peter's home to relax, only to find Peter's mother-in-law sick in bed with a fever. The disciples grabbed him and took him to her and he healed her. Was he finally done? Not even close. That was when things got really crazy. The entire city had learned of his power and they bring all kinds of sick and hurting people to Simon-Peter's to be healed.

After all of that, you would think that he slept pretty well that night. But he woke up in the middle of the night and could not get back to sleep.

Jesus' story here has so much in common with ours. How often do we have one thing after another during our work day? And we come home with an expectation to relax. But we get home and someone is sick or someone has had a bad day and feels a need to let some stress out. Or the work of the day does not feel completed and we feel pressed to return to it. We hope for a good night's sleep, only to wake up in the middle of the night with the stress of the previous day or the next before us.

Life is just tough. And it is so good to know that Jesus experienced the same stress, weariness, emotional trials. He knows exactly how we feel and he is right there with us when we are in the middle of it.

I think this sort of day and night made Jesus wonder what it was all about. He went into a holy place to teach and encountered evil. He went into a friend's home to relax and met sickness. Evening comes and it seems the whole world is pressing down on him. Is this all there is Father? Because I am not sure I can handle it.

When Jesus could not get back to sleep, he knew that he now needed healing. He needed support. He needed guidance and help and a Word from above. So he went out to a deserted place and prayed.

We might not head out to a deserted place in the middle of the night. But we should have the same sense of need. And our Father in heaven wants us to turn to him in these times. He wants to remind us that everything is not up to us. That everything, in fact, is in His hands. God wants to remind us that we are doing so much good. And as God helps us through difficult times, he will make clear the help he wants from us; our life's purpose will become clear.

When the others woke up, Jesus was not around. The word spread and people got worried. And they might have been worried about him, but I think they were mostly worried about themselves. In the other gospels, not only was everyone looking for him, they tried to prevent Jesus from leaving them. So it was less about Jesus and more about them.

And Jesus' reply to their request to stay: "I have got other things to do; other places to go. You all have seen the Kingdom of God and heard all about it. And it remains near and around you so open yourself up to it every day. Now I have to go reveal the Kingdom in other cities and villages."

Friends, we are not responsible for the stress, anxiety, fear, worry-- the emotional broken-ness of others. People who chronically let these things out on others do not find healing. They are not just clinging to others; they are clinging to the crap that keeps them unwell. We all need to people to vent to. But the big question that underlies all of this is whether or not we are paying attention to the things of God. When we do not, we make idols and objects of others. We waiver back and forth between expecting salvation from them and blaming them. We need to spend less time on what is wrong or might go wrong and more time on God's presence, learning His way and discerning His call upon our lives.

I watched the beginning of a documentary on Bob Marley who grew up in tremendous poverty. On top of that, his dad was a white man whom he only saw a few times in his life. His friend was asked if Robert was teased growing up for being biracial and he said, "Teased is not the right word. He was rejected. And he had to work hard for every meal he ate."

Bob said, "They used to call me half-caste or whatever. But I didn't put myself on the black man's side or the white man's side. I be on God's side. The one who created me. The one who caused me to come from black and white."

Bob's gift was, of course, music. Music was his hope of getting out of an unjust and oppressive world. So he completely focused on his it even to the neglect of people. As he grew spiritually, he came to understand that music was the means for him to proclaim the Kingdom of God.

Your vocation— your work is the primary means by which God is calling you to proclaim His Kingdom. You need to know that connection. You need to understand how your work is Kingdom work. And you should learn to communicate how your work is service to the Kingdom.

When Bob went with his wife to his father's family as a young man, they turned them away. His father owned a construction company in Jamaica. So after this experience, Bob wrote the song Cornerstone based on a quote from the Psalms and Jesus. "The stone that the builder refused, will always be the head cornerstone." As his light-skinned aunt who was there that day listened to this song, she confessed to how this came true for Bob.

Was his religion perfectly true? No... but neither is the religion of the outcasts passionately loved by Jesus. But Bob found acceptance by God who welcomed him and taught him to focus on love, mercy and peace and thus used him as a building block for his wonderful purposes. [From the movie "Marley"]

The same went for the leper who was also rejected by society and healed by Jesus. Jesus told him to not talk about what happened and to just go and sacrifice according to what his religion told him to do. But he did not do what Jewish tradition required or what Jesus said. He did the opposite, telling everyone around who would listen what had happened to him. Can we blame him? His society excluded him from community and kept him on the fringes. People could not touch him or they would be unclean. But Jesus touched him and all of that changed. The Kingdom Jesus proclaimed had come and included him and healed him and nothing, not even the King himself, would silence him or his joy and praise.

Like this leper, we sometimes feel left out; unwanted and unloved by people and estranged from shalom—wholeness completion-- by powers and principalities. This is where God steps in and says those sins no longer have any power over you in my Kingdom. And I reign here on earth just as I do in heaven. Here, now and always, you are welcome, completely free and loved beyond conception. How will we respond?

Like those in Capernaum, we all have seen and heard and felt an abundance of love and grace and goodness. Christ has been present and we have experienced His Kingdom. And a part of us wants him to just stay with us where we are. But he wants us to join him where Kingdom things have not been sufficiently experienced or they have been forgotten. That is our common calling.

Do not be held back. Follow Jesus into a deeper understanding of His Kingdom. And do what you can to make sure those on its fringes know that they are more than welcome to its abundant blessings. And God's people say...

The early church, after hearing a Word at the temple, would go to the believers' homes and gather around a table for a meal. They would bring food to the gathering. And, in general, they held their possessions in common. They would eat and remember Jesus and what was left over would go to the poor. So let us bring the offerings of our lives and labor to this table...