

## All this Facing, Picking, and Hiding Is Too Much for One Person

<sup>NRS</sup> **Mark 1:29** As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.<sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.<sup>31</sup> He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.<sup>32</sup> That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.<sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered around the door.<sup>34</sup> And he cured 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.<sup>35</sup> In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.<sup>36</sup> And Simon and his companions hunted for him.<sup>37</sup> When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you."<sup>38</sup> He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."<sup>39</sup> And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Everyone's in such a hurry in Mark's Gospel this morning. *Immediately* the disciples left the synagogue, Mark says. They didn't hang around for coffee and cookies in the Narthex- they left immediately. And then when they get home they tell Jesus about Peter's mother-in-law immediately. They don't even take their sandals off and turn on the game for a few minutes. Everything is done with such immediacy. But then Mark tells us why. The whole time the gang was out working, Simon's mother-in-law was lying in bed with a fever. Now today a fever is no big thing- we have antibiotics if it's bacterial. If it's viral and a person becomes dehydrated we can take them to a hospital and put them on fluids. But in the ancient world there are no hospitals, there are no antibiotics. Fevers killed people. So Peter had a serious problem- and they hurried back to face it.

This is one of those times that the disciples actually serve as an example for us. I have to say, most of the time they serve as examples- but what of NOT to do, not what to do. For instance at the last supper, at the very first communion- what should be the most holy moment of their lives, after Jesus offers the bread and cup, the disciples have a little

argument. They start arguing among themselves about who is the greatest- probably trying to figure out who gets to drink from the cup first. “I get the cup!” shouts Peter. “Oh, you always get the cup grumbles James!” “Jesus!” Peter whines. And Jesus tells them even inbred Greek royalty acts better than this, and he tells them unless they shut up and start acting like servants he’s going to give them something to cry about. (I’m paraphrasing, but it’s the gist.)

And then there’s the garden scene a little later. Jesus tells the disciples to stay up with him, that he wants to pray and he needs company. But not one of them, not one of them can manage to stay awake with him. He leads them, he teaches them, he heals them- and the THANKS he gets? They fall asleep on him. And really this is just the tip of the iceberg. I know we’ve turned the disciples into veritable Saints carving them into marble and rendering them into stained glass- but in the Bible they are about the densest people on the face of the earth, more examples of what NOT to do, not what to do.

But not here. Here they do something quite astonishing. Now, I know we think the miracle here in this text is that Jesus takes Peter’s mother-in-law by the hand and heals her from her illness. This is certainly what every commentator says about this text. But I don’t think this is right- I mean I think it’s wonderful that Jesus heals the woman, but to me the real miracle is that the disciples face up to their problem, their frightening problem so quickly, and so honestly.

Now, I’m sure you’ve never done this, but sometimes when we’re facing something hard, something really hard, sometimes it feels easier not to deal with it, it feels easier to just not think about it, hoping that maybe it will just magically go away. This is especially true with medical issues.

When I served as a chaplain one of the doctors teaching us about cancer told us about a woman who came into the emergency room one day complaining she had a sore throat. But, when the attending noticed this huge lump on the side of her back. “What’s that?” he asked. “What?” she said, completely honestly. “How long have you had this on your side?” “Oh, she said. I don’t know- it’s nothing. I’m here about my throat.” Well, it turned out it was a massive tumor that had been growing for months. And somehow, she was able to put it out of her mind. Enough so that when she finally came in with a sore throat- it was too late to do anything.

But it’s not just health issues we have a hard time facing. When I was in high school I prided myself on my music. I was a percussionist and every year we were tested in all kinds of ways. In the spring we’d all take off for some poor high school somewhere to compete with musicians across the region as individuals and small groups. If you did well you kept going to competitions to make the all-region band and then the big kahuna, the all-state band. Well in the fall we would have state judges come to us and we’d play solo pieces we had prepared as well as ensemble pieces. Now one particularly hard fall where things were just kind of falling apart for me- they were falling apart personally and even academically. Somehow I had gotten into honors Algebra 2, which was just wrong and I was struggling. And on top of all this my teacher had given me a solo for 4 mallet marimba that was simply beyond my abilities- I mean maybe if I had used every minute of the day I might have been able to play it, but even then it would have been a stretch. And so I started to hate the piece, and I started avoiding it. You know what I mean? Like I knew I should have been working on it, but I just couldn’t bring myself to do it. And then I’d feel awful about that- knowing I should have been

working on it. But there were too much going on, and I just didn't have the strength to face it all.

Finally, the night before the judges were coming, I felt so completely trapped. I felt like there was nobody I could talk to about this. I mean I was fine not doing so well in Math and even that things at home weren't all that great- but my music, my music was like the one area I was supposed to have down. But there was no way I was going to make this piece happen, and so I got to a point that surprises me even today. I thought to myself, you know- if I had an accident, like if one of my fingers got cut, there's no way I could play. And so, very late that night, after going back and forth and back and forth, I actually took a razor blade, and I cut my pinky finger- right where you hold the bottom mallet when you play four mallet marimba. Now, before you get too worried about me, my wimpiness was still far more powerful than my fear of playing this piece. And while at the time I thought I had cut it pretty good- in reality I barely scratched the surface.

And this came back to haunt me because the next morning, when I went to my percussion director and told him I had a terrible accident last night and that I didn't think I was going to be able to play- he asked to see it. And I was like, "You want to see it?" "Yeah," he said, "I want to see it." And so I peeled back my band-aid thinking it was going to be this huge cut, this enormous gaping wound, but what we both saw was this tiny little scratch- more like a paper cut than anything. I mean there wasn't even any blood on the bandaid. And even though he wasn't a super patient guy, not a very nice guy, even he knew something was up. And he told me to sit down and if there was anything I wanted to talk about. And I just started to cry. And he told me if I couldn't play that piece that it was going to be OK. And then I just burst into tears and confessed

the whole thing- how I wasn't ready and didn't know what to do. And now, looking back on it, I'm sure he was thinking he wasn't making anywhere NEAR enough money to deal with this kind of stuff, but he was very kind to me, even put his arm around me, and told me it was going to be ok, just to come and talk to him next time.

And I walked away feeling so much better. Feeling like the weight of the world was off of me. I hadn't realized that I wasn't just feeling bad about not being able to play this piece- but it was not facing it, it was the avoiding of it day after day after day, I had no idea how much it had begun to wear on me.

We do this, don't we? We get an email in our in box from someone we uncomfortable with or know is unhappy with us. Or we get a bill in the mail we don't know what to do with. Or someone calls on our phone and you look and see the number and think, "Oh man, there's just no WAY I can talk to them." And sometimes we really do have too much going on and it's OK not to deal with just everything at the same time. But sometimes it's that we just don't want to face it. We want to hide our faces from it hoping it'll just go away- even when we know it won't. And when we do this, when we run, when we push things off, when we refuse to face a thing- not only does it just delay the inevitable, but it robs us of something even more important. It robs us our self-respect, our ability to hold our heads up high, without shame. When we hide from things, we just become a little bit smaller, a little bit more fearful, a little bit less than the beautiful and noble creatures we've been made to be.

And the disciples here to their credit, they face this terrifying illness, they face it, and I think because they faced it when they did- Jesus was able to act quickly, to take her by the hand, and to lift her off of that bed.

Are you hiding from anything this morning? Is there something on your to do list you need to do but have just been avoiding? Is there someone you know you need to talk to but have been avoiding? This morning make up your mind that you can face this, even if you find something out that isn't pleasant- at least you'll know the truth.

The next lesson that comes from this text comes not from the disciples but from Jesus. And while it's not very surprising to get a lesson from Jesus- the lesson itself is incredibly surprising, especially coming from him.

After Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law word gets out about Jesus. Mark here is almost funny I think. He writes: "That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door." Ain't it the truth. No matter how nice we get ourselves lookin', no matter how great things seem to be going, when the disciples go out telling people they're looking for folks who are sick or possessed- the entire city shows up. The entire city.

In his short story "Capital of the World" Ernest Hemingway writes about a personal ad he came across in the Madrid paper that read, "Paco, meet me at the Hotel Madrid noon Tuesday. All is forgiven. I love you." Out of curiosity Hemingway showed up and found 800 young men looking for forgiveness. The local police actually had to be called out to keep the order.

We're all hurting in some way- some of us just hide it a little better is all.

So the disciples go out looking for people in need of the healing and the whole dang town shows up, and the lesson lies in what happens next. While the entire town is waiting expectantly for Christ to lift every hand and heal every wound- did you notice

what actually happens? Though Mark says ALL the town shows up. Jesus only heals SOME. I mean the *entire* town is gathered at his door, and even if this is an exaggeration, the lesson for us is that while maybe they thought Jesus could have and even should have healed everyone there- he doesn't. *Jesus just heals some of them.*

Folks, even Jesus had to pick and choose what to get done. And you have to remember this- especially on those days where it feels like the entire world has lined up at your door. The people in your business world. The people in your family. Heck, one of the things that drives me nuts in the morning when I'm scurrying around trying to get the kids ready to leave and I can't find William's shoes and Ella is starting to have a melt down for like the 10<sup>th</sup> time, all of a sudden I'll be hit from behind and it'll be Rigby, our black lab, who will then promptly go to her mat where I normally feed her, and she'll be sitting there looking at me with these big eyes like, "Helloooo! Did you forget something?" And it's just the last straw, you know. That's normally when I tell her I'm going to turn her into a hat, and then I have to tell William that no, I'm not really going to turn her into a hat. Let's just say mornings are not my favorite time in the world these days.

So the disciples bring him everyone- but Jesus only healed some, but not all of them. Even Jesus has to pick and choose what to get done- and to draw the line. Just think about that for a minute.

You know, if there's a single anxiety that marks us as a culture, a single thing that bugs nearly every one I know- it's that we've got too much on our plate. We feel like we have so much to do and that we just have to get it all done, or else. I was at the Les Schwab the other day getting a tire fixed. And I was hanging out just waiting. And I

have to say I've never experienced a more customer service oriented place- all the people working there are friendly, smiling, running around like chickens with their heads cut off. But while I'm waiting there this very well dressed guy comes in, obviously in a hurry. He's standing at the counter, he's sighing loudly, he's tapping his foot, then his fingers. And when the very friendly person at the desk tells him it's going to be an hour- which is the same thing she was telling everyone else, he actually raises his voice and starts shouting at her, loud enough for everyone to stop and turn around. He asks her if she has any idea how much he has to do, and he screams at her that an hour was just unacceptable. And she apologized and apologized but it wasn't doing any good. It was pretty awful- I had no idea what was going to happen. But then, one of the guys who was sitting down near where I was who had been watching TV, turned the TV off, got up, and walked over. This guy who went over was older than Mr. Shoutypants, but he was big. And as they squared off the air was electrified. But then, in this really calm and quiet voice the big guy said, "Hey, we all have to wait an hour. Why don't you come sit down with us, or come back when you've got a little more time?" He didn't say it angrily- but he did say it firmly. And the craziest thing happened. The man at the counter just stared at the big guy- he didn't say anything but it looked like the wind had been taken out of his sails. And then he turned to the woman, apologized quietly for being so rude, and he just left.

Do you have too much to do? Is it making you crazy? Well, take a minute this morning and let it sink in- Jesus had too much to do, too. And you know what? He didn't get it all done. He didn't get it all done. He healed some of the people, but not all. And he didn't huff and puff about how much he had to do. And he didn't kill himself

trying to keep some ridiculous schedule either. After he did what he could that night, you know what he did? He went to sleep. And in the morning, he didn't finish healing everyone either- he went off in the desert to pray. No big pity party. No big look how busy I am. He just accepted the hard fact that there just aren't enough hours in the day, even for the Son of God. And so he figured out what he could do, did that well, and then he took care of himself, so he could keep on going.

Hey we're all feeling like there's too much to do these days. Well here's what I say- take a deep breath, no really, take a deep breath, in through your nose. That's it. Now let it out through your mouth. Now let your shoulders drop. Now doesn't that feel nice? Now get it into your head that you just aren't going to get it all done this week. You aren't. And you can't. And you aren't expected to. What you are expected to do is to choose wisely what you can do, to do this as well as you possibly can, and keep some sense of balance in your life, because no one gets a medal for freaking out at the Les Schwab. And in case someone gives you grief for this, especially someone in the church- you just remember Jesus didn't get everything done on his to do list either so you're in pretty good company.

Well, the last little piece I want you to hear in this text comes at the very end. When Jesus is out there praying in the wilderness, Mark says that Simon and his friends went hunting for him. And when they find him they tell him, they tell him that everyone is looking for him- that everyone is looking for HIM.

If one of the marks of our culture is being too busy- I'd say another is the result of all this busy-ness, which is the feeling of being alone and overwhelmed. You get all this

stuff piling up on your desk, all these emails in your inbox, all these bills that need to be paid, all these things that have to be done. And it gets to the point where you just want to pull the covers up over your head, you know. Especially when you feel like it's all landing on you and there's no one else to help.

When the disciples have hunted Jesus down, and they tell him everyone is looking for HIM- not them, but HIM, it wouldn't have been hard for anybody to think this story really was about Jesus and no one else. The crowds thought so. The disciples thought so. But Jesus is so much wiser than this.

Jesus could have responded to his friends sighing, "Fine. I'll go. I'll do it." As if it's all about him, and all up to him. But he doesn't. He uses a grammatical construction called the cohortative. And a cohortative means just what it sounds like- it refers to a cohort, a group. It refers to us. So when he responds to his friends, he doesn't say what every prophet before him says, "Here I am Lord, send me." You know what he says? He says, "Fine, let us go." "Let US go." Christ knows as important as he is- even he can't do this alone. He knows ministry, heck life, that it's a team sport. And even though the disciples are about as much help as a hole in the head half the time- he knows it's easier with than without them.

And that's why we come here, I think. Not because we think God will like us more...or give us some gold star for showing up. No, I think we come mainly to see, and to feel, we aren't in this alone. This morning look around- even if you don't know everyone here. Know that we're all in this together, all woven together into piece by the invisible bonds of the Holy Spirit. Know this. Feel this. And let us all, let us all give thanks. **Amen.**