

“Where Did He Go?”
A Sermon Preached by Frank Mansell III
John Knox Presbyterian Church – Indianapolis, Indiana
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Mark 1: 29-39

“As soon as they left the synagogue . . .” Last week, we read that Jesus taught and healed as one with authority. He had called forth his first disciples prior to that, and they became witnesses to what God would do through him. Now, without any delay from their time in the synagogue at Capernaum, they all head over to Simon and Andrew’s house.

Simon’s mother-in-law is ill, so they bring Jesus to her. He reaches out to her, touches her, and her fever is gone. We read that she felt so relieved of the illness, that “she began to serve them.” And, just as his fame had begun to spread after all that occurred in Capernaum, now the people cannot leave Jesus alone. “The whole city was gathered around the door,” bringing their sick for Jesus’ healing touch. Imagine what James, John, Simon and Andrew must have thought of all this. Jesus never turned the people away, healing all who came. These new disciples must have wondered, “Who is this man who does such amazing things? What more will he do?”

Perhaps that explains why the disciples are a bit panicked when they wake up the next morning and cannot find Jesus. “And Simon and his companions hunted for Jesus. When they found him, they said to him, ‘Everyone is searching for you.’” It’s as if they’re saying, “Hey – what are you doing? Where did you go? You’ve got to take care of all these people!” The disciples’ eyes were opened to all that Jesus could do. And it was overwhelming to face such incredible need around them.

One preacher notes: *It was for this reason that Jesus had come to earth. His mission was to meet the needs of humankind, but there were so many of them. How would Jesus meet them all? Where would he get the strength, given his own humanity, to keep up the pace, to continually face the crowd with the fresh new teaching that they desperately needed, to keep on giving of himself in limitless ways?*

Sound familiar? If Jesus needed help, what about you and me? Every day there are needs to be met, decisions to be made, business to be attended to. Every day there are people to relate to, conflicts to be resolved, actions that require more than we in our own strength alone can achieve.

If Jesus needed help, what about you and me?

Jesus didn’t struggle with these concerns long. Early in his life and ministry, he discovered the practicality and the power of an early morning rendezvous, as the writer Mark indicates with his words: “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went to a solitary place, where he prayed.”

Jesus knew that he needed help. He knew that he could not live in this world without God. If he was forever going to be giving out, he must sometimes be taking in. If he was going to spend himself for others, he must spend time spiritually refreshing himself. Jesus knew that it was not humanly possible to accomplish all that he needed to accomplish every day of his life in his own strength alone. He also knew that he didn't have to. Not when the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-wise God, his loving Father was ever present, ready to provide, whatever he needed, whenever he needed it, however he needed it. All he had to do was ask. The Bible says we have not because we ask not. If we ask, we will receive.

That's what prayer is. Prayer is coming to God. Prayer is seeking God. Prayer is the appeal of the soul to God. Prayer is standing before God as "an empty pitcher before a full fountain." Prayer is connecting with God who is the power source. Prayer is opening ourselves up to God for nourishment, as the flowers and trees open up to their environment: the air, the sunlight, and the rain. Prayer is communing with God. It is living an intimate relationship with God, surrendering all that we are to all that God is, as Jesus did, who said, "The Father and I are one, the works that I do are not mine but the One who sent me." In prayer, Jesus sought the strength that only communion and fellowship with God could provide. If Jesus needed this in his life, what about you and me?

Let's be totally honest, shall we? Most of our meetings with God are not planned. Our prayers are occasional, spontaneous, spur of the moment prayers. If we meet with God, it's usually an emergency or a crisis. Our backs are up against the wall, bills are due, a child is sick, it's the end of the semester and there are exams to take, too many papers to write, too many proposals to get in, we need help. I know what I'll do, we say, we'll call God. If the truth be told, we have tried everything else, now we will try God.

Something came up so we had to take time to talk with God. That's no way to carry on a relationship with the lover of our souls and the one we say we love above all else. If you love God, why not take time to talk to God and let God talk to you.

Our friendship with God should be a daily and consistent one, like that of Bertram Polloch who was one time Bishop of Norwich. The life of a Bishop is a very busy one, with people coming and going all the time, clamoring for your attention. Bishop Polloch had certain times set aside for prayer. No matter who came to see him at those times, they were told that he could not be interrupted because he had "an appointment with God." We need to have an appointment with God every day. It needs to be a priority engagement that cannot be broken (Cynthia Hale, "Early Morning Rendezvous," February 18, 2011, http://www.csec.org/csec/sermon/hale_4420.htm).

Where did God go? God never left. We can find God and his son, Jesus, whenever we take the time to make God our priority – in prayer, in worship, in service, in discipleship.

We find God and Jesus in the meal we celebrate this morning. As the communion hymn says, “We come as guests invited” to this table which our Lord has prepared. This isn’t a once-a-month ritual which we attempt to replicate without errors or mistakes. This is a moment when we pause, listen, remember, and receive the joy of God’s undying love for us, his children. This is a time when we recognize that Christ is in our midst, and through a loaf of bread and a glass of juice feeds our souls with the nourishment which can only come from our loving God. Where did he go? He’s right here.

As we live out our lives of discipleship, may we never lose sight of our Lord, who is always ready to hear whenever we are ready to pray.

Thanks be to God. Amen.