

5 February 2012

Reading: Mark 1:29-39

Reader: Carol Coull

Background to the reading

This is a wonderful text but in order to understand it, we need to understand something of the lifestyle of the Mediterranean world.

In those days a newly married couple normally lived with the husband's family until they made enough money to move out on their own. In this case, Simon's father-in-law had probably passed away, and Simon and his wife had taken her widowed mother into their home. Caring for one's extended family was more common then than it is today.

The Sabbath usually ended Saturday at sundown. Mark mentions that it was "after sunset" to let us know that the Sabbath was over, because it would have violated the Sabbath for anyone to help someone that is ill. It is interesting that this woman would be considered unclean due to her illness and therefore no-one was able to touch her. If you touched someone that was unclean, you became unclean as well. In our passage Jesus goes against the religious laws of his time by "touching" this woman when He took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her. Jesus healed her in the sense that He changed her status from being ill, unclean to healthy, that is clean again.

Mark overstates the reaction of the people living in their village by saying that the whole town gathered "at the door" because most homes around Capernaum had only one room, and even a larger home could not have accommodated many people. The doorway may have opened to the street or to a courtyard shared with other

homes, as often in Galilean towns. Teachers reputed to work miracles rapidly drew large crowds.

Then the Jesus healed many. In those days any illness was regarded as evil and ill people as demon possessed because it did nae rhyme with the goodness of God. The Greek word that is used in the text “therapeuo” can mean to restore, heal, cure and serve! He served all the ill people by allowing them to be “included” in society again by becoming clean.

Jesus had power over the demons that according to Mark had knowledge of who Jesus was. He took control over them.

After this we read in the second passage that Jesus went in the dark to a solitary place where he could pray. Then the disciples came looking for Him because everyone was wondering where He was. This is part of the mystery of Jesus identity which the disciples did nae understand. They did nae know who Jesus really was and throughout the Gospel of Mark that would be the underlying theme. Jesus was the Son of God and needed time to speak to His father in peace.

Interestingly enough then Jesus replied that they must go to the other villages nearby that had not yet heard of Him. Jesus emphasized his whole mission namely to preach and restore people from being unclean to being clean.

Amen

MP 23 All things bright and beautiful

Sermon

The text verse for the sermon: ³⁸Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”

In a sense our text is a portrayal of a typical day in the life of Jesus.

So in the text we find several events going on over a period of two days. And in each event there are lessons to be learnt.

I visit quite a number of people that is ill and I often find that many feel vulnerable, exposed and in need of someone who could handle them with respect and dignity. Some illnesses have the ability, just like in biblical times, to almost degrade the body which could lead the patient to suffer mentally too. And it is here where you and I can be the messengers of God’s grace through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We have the example of Jesus on how to treat people that are ill and in need of comfort, respect and support. We do not require considerable medical knowledge or super powers to “heal”. We can just do what Jesus did – being there, listening, touching and helping. We can just treat them with dignity and respect. We can pray for them, and with them. We can care for them in a loving way. We can read to them some passage from God’s word.

And despite Jesus' busyness the previous day, He still found time to go to a solitary place to spend some time with His heavenly Father. We tend to be so busy with everything that we almost do not find time for anything especially the things that really matters namely to spend time with God. Although the computers make our workloads much easier, we still work the same hours. Although people in the old days had to take a day off to do their washing, nowadays despite our washing machines and tumble dryers that can wash and dry in an hour, we still fill our days, and still do not find time to be still in God's presence. We need time to charge our spiritual batteries. We need God's presence among us, around us and in us. We need God's Spirit to help us in our daily suffering, challenges and joy.

And then after Jesus prayed He continued to be busy again doing what God wanted him to do namely to preach God's grace and forgiveness and to restore the lives of ill people that were in need of someone who could restore their dignity and honour.

And this is what we need to do. We do not have to preachers. We can just be ourselves talking to others about the love, grace and forgiveness of God.

May we never stop being the people of Christ wherever we go, nae matter how busy we are. May we always find time to spend it with God and His people, showing them the love, peace that can only come from Him.

Amen