

Fifth Sunday – February 8, 2015

Typical of the breathless, staccato style of Mark's gospel, we are treated today with a day in the life of Jesus. Lest we be distracted by the simple razzle-dazzle of all this activity and miss some of the hidden messages, let's pause over a few of the gospel events and see where the beauty lies.

Let's start with Jesus' cure of Peter's mother-in-law. As the gospel says, Jesus approached, took her hand, and helped her up. The fever left her...and she waited on them. Some folks are apt to comment, "Sure, what's new. Instead of fixing some food for themselves, the disciples have Jesus cure the lady so she could wait on them. They should have gotten their own sandwiches."

The nay-sayers may have a point, except that's not the language of the Scriptures. Here this event means that once one is touched by Christ, then one immediately becomes a disciple and has no choice but to serve others. In short, the fever leaves and service begins. God's service to her becomes her service to others.

Then there's that mysterious phrase: "He drove out many demons, not permitting them to speak because they knew him." They knew he was the promised Messiah, God's own Son, but the point is Jesus didn't want that to get around just yet.

Jesus didn't want to be a red carpet celebrity. Why? Although he may call followers, he does not court fans. Fans scream until the next celebrity comes along, but followers take up the cross. Mark's gospel is asking, what are we: genuine followers or mere fans?

Next, there is this sentence. "Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place where he prayed." Jesus needed to resist his fans and his growing fame to follow something deeper. Mark's gospel is saying that it takes some quiet time, some prayer time, to find our true home, to grasp one's identity and mission in life. Mark's gospel is asking: do we know where home is?

Finally, in this day in the life of Jesus, we can pick up on a central theme of healing. We may even note that there is a difference between curing and healing. Cures aim at returning our bodies to what they were in the past; healing uses what is present to move us more deeply into soul. If a person has not been cured of the effects of a stroke, he or she can certainly experience profound healings of mind and heart. In fact, it is often in uncured sickness that the healing that we need begins. "Yes, it is a truth long known, that some secrets are hidden from health." (Cf. John Updike's "Fever").

The very source of health and healing is Jesus Christ. Where the Lord of life has entered, there is no room for death.

Jesus cured some, not all. He was more interested in healing, healing the soul, and driving out any demons. Sometimes gospel wisdom tells us that an uncured body can bring about a healed soul.