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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church – Florissant, MO
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, February 7, 2021
Isaiah 40:21-31; Mark 1:229-39

A day in the life of Jesus according to Mark is exhausting. He begins, as we heard last week, in the synagogue teaching and driving out demons. Today we hear that “immediately” after that he goes to Simon and Andrew’s house with his friends. There is no chance to put his feet up. As soon as he gets there his friends tell him that Simon’s mother-in-law is sick with a fever. He goes right to her and he takes her hand and heals her. That word spreads fast and by evening they bring to Jesus all who were sick or possessed by demons. Mark tells us that the whole city gathered at the door.

Then, before the sun even comes out, Jesus slips away to a quiet place to be alone and pray. After the day he had, he might have been tempted to sleep in. But he knew he needed that time alone with God. His disciples, though, weren’t too happy with that. They “hunted him down.” The Greek word used here has a stronger, more hostile sense than we hear. Peter and his friends have come to say, “What are you doing out here when there are so many people who need you?” They are telling Jesus he is wrong. He should not be sitting in solitude and prayer when there are anxious crowds who need his immediate attention. Jesus confidently tells them he knows his mission and it’s time to pick up and continue on. In spite of the disapproval of his friends and the daunting task ahead, he goes on.

As I read and prayed over this passage this week, I felt Jesus’ exhaustion and I thought about how exhausted we are, too. We are tired of Covid-19. We are tired of the news of partisan fighting day in and day out. We are tired of wearing masks. And now we aren’t sure if one mask is enough or if we need to double up. We are tired of waiting for a vaccine. We are tired of being

at home. We are exhausted by the 24-hour news cycle. This morning, we can rest assured that Jesus understands our exhaustion. Our God, in the flesh, has lived the exhausting days that we are living through right now.

Mark tells us that, in the midst of this exhausting time, Jesus stepped away to be alone and to pray. His disciples challenged him and told him there was too much going on for him to have the luxury to stop and pray. But we can see in Jesus' response to them that it was the time away that cleared his head and opened his heart to God's desire for him. It was that time away that lifted him out of his exhaustion and sent him on his way, confident in his mission to preach the good news of God's kingdom.

Mark also tells us that they brought *ALL* to Jesus, all the people who were sick or possessed with demons. But we hear that Jesus cures *many*, not all. He steps away before everyone is healed. Even Jesus didn't cure them all. He can step away because he knows there is a bigger picture. He knows the God of Abraham and Sarah, the God of Jacob and Isaac. The God that his parents taught him about. This is the God that he makes time for in the midst of the demands of life.

Jesus would have known the words of Isaiah that we heard this morning. He grew up on the stories of his ancestors who struggled and grew weary, who lost hope and faith. And for whom God always came through anyway. Isaiah challenges the Israelites to remember God and all God's promises. God who gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. God who renews their strength and lifts them up as on Eagle's wings. God who promises that we shall run and not be weary. We shall walk and not be faint.

Jesus could step away when he needed to because he knew God intimately and he trusted that God would continue to lift him up and continue to lift up God's people in the midst of their despair and their exhaustion and their illnesses and their confusion. This is our story, too. Sometimes we forget that. We carry the weight of the world on our shoulders. It's easy to feel powerless and overwhelmed right now by this disease that is swirling around us and by the destructive forces of ego and misused power and deception.

What Isaiah reminds us and what Jesus shows us is that this place of weariness is where God meets us. When we feel most like God is asleep on the job – that's when God is reaching for us to renew us and make us whole again. That is often when we are most ready to receive God and all that God promises. That is when we are less convinced that our way is the best way. God is not a magic pill that will take all the struggle away. We don't wait on lightning or thunder or miracles necessarily. But if we face our weariness and go to God with it in the silence, as the storm rages around us, God becomes real.

Notice that Jesus doesn't just talk about God. He doesn't teach cold facts or administer an exam. He lives in God, he waits on God, he experiences God in his weariness and in his joys. And that is our invitation this morning. What will we choose? A distant God we can talk about and be certain about? Or a God who resides deep within our bones and continues to surprise us and carry us on his wings?

We have a choice. We can give up and give in or we can double down on hope. My prayer for us this morning is that we can follow in the steps of those who have come before us in faith. That we can be resolute in holding on to God and waiting on God through the storm. It is a conscious choice. God has already chosen us. Will we choose God? We may be exhausted, but God is not.