

Mark 1:29-39      5th Sunday after the Epiphany      February 6, 1994

*As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.*

*32That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34And 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. 35In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." 38He 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." 39And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.*

Almost every day we hear the same story - legislators accepting checks for five hundred dollars for going to a party. A comment made when a microphone is turned on that the speaker thought was off. Deeds from long ago like not paying social security for a domestic worker, or assisting a friend with some behind the scenes help. Or the story that is the same with new faces, the politician unfaithful in marriage, the religious leader sexually abusing children, or a parishioner. Every one of these names that makes the headlines had one thought in common: No one is watching.

I wonder how we will ever face God when the time comes. I wonder at our shock to realize that with God the microphone is always open, the deed always seen.

I don't think our lawlessness is a matter of ignorance. Sometimes people say to me, "Pastor you need to teach the people right from wrong." But when I ask myself and others if knowing right from wrong is the problem, the answer always comes, "I know what is right - I just don't do what is right."

So adultery is excused by finding fault with the one sinned against. And politicians taking checks from lobbyists with the old standby, everyone else is doing it.

And we all train ourselves to think that God has blinders on.

Maybe we are like an infant playing peekaboo. As long as I don't see you, you don't see me.

If I don't think about God, maybe I'm not being seen.

And I can gossip, and I can criticize, and I can be full of bitterness and greed, and still think I'm doing pretty well as long as the microphone is not on, as long as the public does not find out.

Early in the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place and there he prayed. Jesus spoke to God, sought direction for his life from God.

He did not look in himself for the answers. He did not go out to meditate.

He did not gather the disciples and discuss plans and directions.

Jesus prayed.

While he was praying Peter and Andrew and James and John hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you."

The evening before Jesus had been the center of a great crowd, healing, casting out demons. The people had come to Jesus. Their needs were apparent. Now they were gathering again. The disciples came to Jesus because they knew what the crowd wanted from Jesus the crowd should have.

But hear what Jesus said, "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. "

Jesus life was not lived before the face of the people, responding to their needs, their hopes. Jesus' life was lived before the face of God.

And so he left that clamoring crowd and went to other villages, only to leave the crowds there as well. In every place he went this was his message, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news."

Jesus did not come for healing, nor for helping. He did not gather the crowds so that he might make life easier for them and give them what they wanted.

Jesus came to do the work of God, calling people to repent, which means to turn around. God's rule is as near to your life as your turning around. You are part of God's kingdom when God rules over you. Did you hear that Good news? You will not belong to a world that is passing away any more - a world that will use you up and spit you out. You belong to God. Every moment of your day is to be lived in the presence of God, before the face of God. Turn around.

This would be life for God's people. No more sneaking, no more worrying about whether microphones were live, or whether the IRS was looking. Now, today, you can live before the face of God, every minute and hour lived in the presence of God.

Believe in that good news.

And what of yesterday? Bring your yesterday before the face of God also; God will not turn away from it nor turn away from you because of it. Forgiveness, a new beginning, God does this for you through Jesus.

But God wants more for you than your yesterdays. That is why God has sent Jesus out to this village to find you this morning.

Turn around. Believe the good news that every moment of your today is lived in the presence of God - the loving presence of God.

Believe.

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