

Our lives are so busy, aren't they? We hurry from one thing to the next – trying to finish everything everywhere all at the same time – in what little time that we have with whatever energy we have. Coffee becomes a necessity as it squelches the “tired-indicating” nerves that remind us that – yes, sleep is important – even though it may temporarily hinder our productivity. We all know what can happen, however, if we continue to work and not rest.

Now, Jesus wasn't a farmer or a teacher or a doctor or nurse, administrator, or parent – at least not in how we define these occupations/vocations today. However, we do know that Jesus was very busy. In Mark's gospel, the story of Jesus is told in a very intense way. The story moves rapidly from scene to scene, as if there is only so much time and space to tell it. And it seems as though Jesus, too, is moving quickly from task to task in place to place.

In today's scripture, from the Gospel of Mark, we are nearing the end of the first chapter and so much has happened already in Jesus' ministering life. He has been baptized, spent 40 days in the wilderness being tempted, and travelled already by foot, at least 106 miles from the place of his baptism to the city of Capernaum. He chose disciples and taught in the synagogue and healed a man with an unclean spirit.

“Word of him spreads like wildfire, such that by the 28th verse of this gospel, it says: “*At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.*” It didn't just trickle out, it poured. And people came to him - more and more and more of them. A flood of need.¹ (Haynes, 03)” And then Jesus and his new disciples went for lunch – which is where we pick up Jesus' story today.

Mark 1:29-39

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.

³¹ He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³² That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.

³³ And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴ And 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.

³⁵ In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷ When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” ³⁸ He 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.”

³⁹ And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

We almost miss the pause that then happens in all of Jesus' busy actions because it is deeply buried in the whole list of the fast-moving events of the Gospel.

¹ Haynes, Peter L. *Wide-Eyed by Starlight*. 09 02 2003. 29 01 2024.
<<https://rockhay.tripod.com/sermons/2003/03-02-09.htm>>.

We read, *“In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.”* Jesus had a time out. Now, not the time-out that parents or teachers give to kids, but rather perhaps more of a “get me out of here because if I don’t get some space, I’m going to go crazy!” kind of time out. Jesus had a busy schedule, and he knew that if he didn’t get up early before anyone else was awake then he would NEVER get the space that he needed to breathe and pray.

But they found him. Jesus possibly made a deep sigh and perhaps pasted on a smile and answered, “Let’s go then and get on with this job of spreading the good news of God’s love in all the neighboring towns. After all, that’s what I came to do – may as well get going.”

Taking a moment amidst the daily chaos to engage in prayer isn't just a distant goal for those who have everything sorted out. It’s not reserved for a select religious few who are obviously much closer to Jesus than the rest of us. At its core, it's a fundamental aspect of survival.

When Jesus took a break, he didn’t set up on the side of a mountain – like a guru or a Buddha-esque figure. Jesus’ behaviour here wasn’t like some holier than thou contemplative who can push away all humanity in search for the divine. No, this Jesus that Mark encountered was far more authentic to our life.

As we often place Jesus on some pedestal, far out of our reach, so also, we often approach prayer. Many of us, when we think of prayer and our “need for prayer” we can treat it like we do exercise in the first week of January. I can’t tell you how many commercials I’ve seen telling me to get the new fancy treadmill /bike /weight training machine. The actors selling the machines make it sound so easy and fit bodies seem so attainable...if we just...

When we see prayer in the same way as we do the chore of exercise, then it, like our rowing machine in the basement, becomes a constant reminder of how out-of-shape we are spiritually. Guilt or shame can motivate us to seek out new and fancy equipment or books or retreats or even wilderness experiences to improve into our ideal of spiritual perfection, but these fads are not sustainable.

Here, in our scripture today, Jesus’ prayer isn’t a strain. It isn’t like Jesus is groaning, getting up early to convince himself to put on his running shoes and head out for his pre-dawn prayer marathon training session. That kind of prayer just sounds so draining. This prayer time – that we see in today’s scripture is more like feasting.

Feasting – like fasting – the way that fasting is intended as a spiritual discipline – is about being conscious about what we are ingesting. Peter L Haynes says that fasting isn’t as much abstaining from food as it is consciously eating at a different table. He continues, “When fasting, it takes a while to make that shift - but, once made, fasting becomes feasting. Prayer itself is like a meal. One needs to eat to get through the day. Jesus himself needed his early-morning meal, his time of communion with the Father. He could not have made it through the flood of human need overwhelming him every day without this meal. It was a matter of survival. (Haynes, 03) Like Jesus, we need this kind of prayer too. It’s a matter of survival – well, not just to survive, but also to thrive.

Many of us are completely unaware of how much we long for that spiritual connection with God. This longing – this HOLY longing is uncomfortable and of course it makes us feel vulnerable and perhaps even ashamed – but perhaps it takes these feelings and examining these feelings to help us understand our hunger for God.

But maybe hunger – and feasting and fasting is not a great illustration for you. Perhaps we can look at praying like Jesus did in our text today, as more like breathing. You must breathe. If you're not breathing, you're not alive.

Prayer is like breathing. Just like there is no life without breath, there is no relationship with God without prayer. How many times have you felt or heard – “I feel confined, I just need space to breathe!” There are many “living dead” around us, persons for whom the mad pace of life leaves them spiritually “breathless.” If we say that prayer is like breathing, then we can also say that prayer, like breathing, is an often-unconscious effort – yet so necessary for thriving, not just surviving.”

When we were first born – thrust from the womb of comfort and security into the harsh light and sound of the birthing room we opened our mouths to take in the breath of life. In the same way, when we open our mouths (metaphorically speaking) our hearts, our spirit to God, and inhale, God's spirit fills us, enlivens us and nurtures us.

Now, to be clear, “God is not just *waiting* on us to tell him what to do, like a heavenly *waiter* standing beside our table *awaiting* our order. If anything, prayer is just the opposite. We wait on the LORD – but not to serve, but to anticipate and to *await with bated breath* what the LORD will do, say, instruct next. Waiting on the LORD is the openness to receive life, energy, peace, hope, whatever is the need of this day. Waiting on the LORD is completely opposite to the hustle and bustle and the brainless busyness of our over-worked and under-spiritually nourished selves.

Isaiah 40: 28-31 says,

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

This “waiting for the LORD” this, “before the sun rose getting up to go to a deserted place – because you want to, not because you HAVE to” this eating and delighting in what we need to survive, this breathing in the very breath of God is all so very very necessary for us to have a mindful life that is praising God.

THIS kind of prayer is a way of life and will sustain us when the task is large and the workers are few, when the journey is taking longer than it ought and we are so very tired, and when life is giving you lemons and there's no sugar to give you lemonade.

THIS kind of prayer will feed us when we didn't even know that we were hungry, it will sustain us when we didn't even realize that we needed to catch our breath. Waiting on the LORD with anticipation excites us to see what God is doing in the world and gives us the clarity to see our task within it.

Jesus taught us many things, and today, we realize that Jesus taught us, not only how to pray, but also the need to find space to breathe and rest and wait for the LORD to find us.

You know the promise. Let's hear it again:

³¹but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.