

Arvada UMC

## A Quiet Place

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Mark 1: 29-39

We get a sense of what life was like for the people of Gospel times in this passage.

First, Jesus worships at the synagogue. It's evening, as in Jewish tradition.

Then he goes to the home of brothers Simon and Andrew, his friends and recently called followers. There, he heals Simon's mother-in-law of a fever, who gets up and begins serving them. Imagine this house where the brothers live. It's probably not large, yet extended family lives there. There is no electricity, so as the sun begins to set, lanterns are being lit around the house.

There's a knock at the door. Someone, let's say Andrew, opens it and finds standing there a neighbor who has brought her husband to be healed of his disease. Andrew turns around and looks at Jesus, who motions them inside. He takes the hand of the diseased husband, looks him in the eye, and the man experiences something—something that causes him to feel whole again.

The man gives thanks, and as he opens the door to leave, there on the porch stand more people, all seeking healing-- some from diseases, some to be freed of worries and fears and guilt and despair and all the other demons of human life that consume our days. These people standing there on the porch of the little house are not so different from us, likely, for don't we all seek healing from our illness and from the brokenness of our lives? The text tells us "The whole city was gathered at the door."

The man who has just been with Jesus sees others there on the porch turns around and looks at Jesus, who has just sat back down again. Jesus sees the questioning look in the man's eye and nods. He gets up and comes to the door. He begins tending to them, one person at a time.

It was sundown, the gospel writer says, as the people gathered at the door. We can imagine the trail of lanterns coming toward the little house, and the trail of lanterns leaving the little house, some on their own, some accompanied by a friend or family. We don't know how long into the night this went, the crowds pressing in on Jesus, seeking healing from diseases, seeking wholeness from the demons of life. But surely it takes a bit of time to heal a whole city of people in need.

The next thing Mark tells us about Jesus is this: *In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.* (Mark 1: 35)

After a night of tending to people from the whole city, Jesus gets up before dawn, and goes away—we don't know where, but somewhere away, a deserted place where there are no people. Even the disciples don't know where he went, for the story tells us that Simon and his friends were "hunting" for him. "Hunting." Not casually looking, but *hunting*. They intended to find him!

There is Jesus, resting in his quiet place, when he hears a rustle. He looks up and sees Simon standing there. Simon says, "Everyone is searching for you."

Is this the same "everyone" who had come the night before to be healed? Or just the disciples? Or the brothers? It doesn't matter, for Jesus doesn't even pause. We get no hint of frustration, no hint of him wondering what tracks he left when thought he had been so careful as he left the little house in the wee hours, when it was still dark.

Jesus doesn't seem to bat an eyelid as he looks up from his quiet place and sees Simon. Instead, he simply says, in effect, "Okay, let's go. Back at it." The text has him saying, *"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."* (Mark 1: 38)

And Mark tells us, *"And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons."*

The world is pressing in, needing Jesus. He offers his presence, which heals. He sneaks out to a quiet place. The world comes calling. And he goes, again.

When the world presses in on you, and you need to get away to a quiet place, where do you go? Do you have a sacred space where you can remember who you are, where you can touch base with your very soul, where you can find your center again, and clarity of your purpose?

We all need that kind of space, I believe, and it will look very different for all of us. Some people have a certain room in their home set aside for centering. Some have a place on a trail, a bench in a park. For some it may be a particular restaurant, or a chair in the living room, or a stone in a garden, or a bathtub, or at the kitchen stove, or in a workshop. For some it may be here in this very room.

Wherever it is for you, mark it in your mind. Name it for what it is. It's the place where the world melts away and we have space to listen; it's the place where the quietest voice inside us speaks, the one that gets pushed aside and never pushes back. It waits, gently, patiently for us to tend to it. It is the voice of our soul, the whisper of God. And it matters. With an eternal quality, it matters.

Sages call it different things: Home. Mindfulness. The Center. Presence. The Ocean of Love. When we remember it, we remember who and why we are. And when we find it, this seat of the soul, we remember our connection to all. The Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us that in such singularity of identity, in the center, we are not alone. He says:

*Let us visualize the ocean with a multitude of waves. Imagine that we are a wave on the ocean, and surrounding us are many many waves. If the wave looks deeply within herself, she will realize that her being there depends on the presence of all the other waves. Her coming up, her going down, her being big or small depend entirely on how the other waves are. Looking into yourself, you touch the whole, you touch everything; you are conditioned by what is there around you....*

He goes on:

*It seems as though the wave and the water are two different things, but in fact they are one. Without water there would be no wave. And if we remove the wave there is no water.... One thing contains everything. With the energy of mindfulness, we can see deeply. (Thich Nhat Hanh, Going Home, Riverhead Books, 1999, pp. 3-6)*

The people around us are waves, like us. And we're all abiding in the one ocean of God. We affect each other by our movements, by our separation from or integrity with the divine.

Back to our story, Jesus is resting in a quiet place, honoring his center. Why does he display no frustration when Simon comes up? Why doesn't he blink upon being found? Why is he immediately ready to get back on the road to the neighboring towns?

Perhaps because of what separates him from most of us: Jesus lives from his soul, always. Simon standing there is a wave like him, part of the ocean rather than an interruption. There is no separation within Jesus. He doesn't leave his soul, push it aside, doesn't make it wait until the to-do list is done. He lives from his center, abides in it, moves from it.

Is that what it means to be fully human and fully divine? To give our humanity to the wholeness and goodness and love that we call God? And to let *that* lead us every moment? To abide in our center and let that move out? Is that what Jesus did? Is that why his presence was healing to those he met? And yet even he had to get away to a quiet place. How much more so do we?

As we receive Communion this morning, we're invited into a quiet place. Some sages call it "stillness". Through the music, in this space, in a morsel of bread and a bit of juice that reminds us of Jesus, we're invited to find our center. to listen to the quietest whisper within us, where God abides. We're invited this morning to remember our souls. And when there is movement beside us, or someone stands up to pass the bread to a neighbor in the pew, we're invited to see them as a

wave like us, a wave in this deep and vast ocean that is God's life, all of us sharing at the same table of grace, remembering who we are.