



13B EPIPHANY 5B - BIBLE STUDY

Discipleship, the first 100 days

Abstract

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. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him.

Mark 1:34-36 (NRSV)

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Discipleship, the first 100 days

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2021 | EPIPHANY | FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY | YEAR B

Old Testament Isaiah 40:21–31
 Psalm Psalm 147:1–11, 20c
 New Testament 1 Corinthians 9:16–23
 Gospel Mark 1:29–39

Mark 1.29-39

Jesus shows us his priorities – he knows what he must do and demonstrates this by healing and proclaiming the good news. However, Jesus also takes time out to get away from the crowds and be alone in prayer – he knows what he must do to care for himself and stay true to his mission.

Do we find or make enough time to rest with God? What difference does it make?

This week we explore: demonstrating priorities through action.

Begin with an opening prayer

O God, we come to you out of our week –
 with its successes and disappointments,
 its joys and its struggles.

By your Holy Spirit,
 help us to focus on you now,
 to listen as you speak to our hearts,
 so that we may be better prepared
 to serve you in the week to come.
 Amen.

Gospel

Mark 1:29–39

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

³⁸ Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Bible notes

In this chapter of Mark's Gospel, Jesus moves between public spaces and private ones, and we learn how he uses each to sustain himself and others. From the synagogue, he comes to the house of his first disciples, perhaps seeking to retreat from the crowds. Throughout this Gospel, Mark makes it clear that healing has a noticeable impact on Jesus (e.g. 5.30), and a house is often a safe space for him (7.24). However, even in a private home, Jesus' healing power is still needed. The woman's healing makes it possible to re-establish the order of the whole household – the story is a small-scale reflection of Jesus' impact on society at large.

After dark, when the sabbath is over, people are able to travel and carry their sick to see Jesus. The door of the house becomes a meeting-place and Mark vividly suggests the chaos of a desperate crowd. People needed healing – alongside the pain and trauma of illness, it created economic problems where workers were unable to earn their living. Jesus wields complete authority over a range of illnesses and, as in the synagogue, shows his power over the demons by forbidding them to speak. For the first time, Mark shows us the extent of Jesus' power, verifying the big claims he made for Jesus in his opening verses.

Then, in the stillness before dawn, Jesus retreats again to a deserted place. For the Israelites, the desert was the place to meet God, and Jesus too uses this safe space to pray. But his disciples find this hard to handle – they 'hunt him down' and demand that he returns to the scene of his triumph. After his time of prayer, Jesus has other ideas. He is ready to expand his mission, and they embark on their first journey together, in which preaching and exorcism go hand-in-hand, each reinforcing the other as proof of Jesus' real identity.

Reflection

When politicians or chief executives begin a new role or time in office – including in very recent time the President of the USA – they often set out a list of priorities for their first 100 days, giving a sense of the direction of their thinking. Then, we critically evaluate their achievements against their stated hopes and goals. Here, Jesus is establishing his priorities for his mission. He preaches and heals, he resources his disciples, and he underpins all this with a life of prayer. There is no stated list of aims and objectives. Far more powerfully, people can see from his actions what he wants to achieve. What do our actions, as individuals or as a faith community, say about our vision for the next steps for us?

Questions for reflection

- In what circumstances do you feel the need to press the snooze button?
- How well balanced is your life between action and reflection?
- How far do you demonstrate what you really care about in your daily living?



Go with God

Mark a note with a small cross each time you are able to bring a priority of God's into your daily life.

A prayer to end the Bible Study

Lord Jesus,
go with us into the world this week.
Help us to remain focused upon you
and to make your priorities our priorities in
all the places you are sending us.
Amen.

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