

Sermon Ordinary Sunday 5 Year B 2018

The Gospel portion placed before us today gives us a 'day in the life of Jesus.' And we see it is a day containing many different elements; many elements which feed into and support one another; which show the depth and quality of his life. We hear a fair bit today in the media about the need for the *balanced life*. We are becoming aware that so many of the illnesses and pathologies - physical and psychological - have come from living an *unbalanced life*. We have allowed entire swathes of our human make-up to become neglected or ignored. I suspect the neglect of the spiritual life in our day and age is one of the principal causes of so much dis-order and dis-ease we witness today. But our physical, our spiritual, our intellectual and emotional selves, our communal and personal selves, all need to be brought into balance and harmony with each other.

And so, in the gospel today we see Jesus enjoy communal life. He shares time with his disciples and their families. He exercises there his ministry of healing and exorcism. We hear too how after a hard day's work, Jesus withdraws for quiet and solitude to pray. And from that place of prayer and communion with the Father he goes out again to continue his work of healing, exorcism and preaching.

As followers of Jesus and seeking to live a whole, balanced life we could do no better than see here a pattern for our own life. Because the life of faith - just as any other part of our life - is at risk of becoming unbalanced. We have to work hard that one part of our life of faith isn't allowed to dominate at the cost and expense of other important parts. And we seek this balanced life, this whole life, not simply for our own benefit or therapy. We do so that our lives point to God, to his wonder and beauty. Our lives ought to reflect something of the beauty, the purity, the holiness of *God's* own life.

And so, as we see it at work in the Gospel today, it is, firstly, important for the faithful followers of Jesus to include in their balanced, ordered life a place for works of mercy, works of love. It is not enough to say it is the duty and responsibility of others. It is not enough to settle for tokenistic gestures. At one level the works of mercy - visiting the sick, giving alms, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked; the works of justice, peace and reconciliation - is the easy part of faith. It is the part of an active faith most easily received by those outside the family of the church. It can be the part of faith which stands independent of doctrine or assent to certain theological truths. We might have doubts about the faith, but in the mean time we can get on with its work. But at the same time, it is costly. We see it illustrated in the gospel today. It means getting our hands dirty. In the world-view of the Gospel writer Mark, to touch a sick person carried with it the risk of incurring ritual impurity. To touch a sick person was to cut you off from others.

The second crucial element to the balanced Christian life we see at work in the gospel today is the life of prayer. Mark is usually quite spare in his details. He is the shortest of the Gospels, the most succinct. He cuts to the chase which makes his Gospel quite fresh and immediate.

And so, the details we get in Mark telling us how in the morning, long before dawn, Jesus gets up and leaves the house to go off to a lonely place to pray highlights the importance of this little scene. Mark wants us to take notice of this aspect of Jesus' life. We see that there is a growing enthusiasm for Jesus and wonders he performs. Indeed the '*whole town*' press in at the door of Peter's mother-in-law's house. There is a sense, then, that there is personal cost to Jesus in this popularity. And so, he withdraws to pray. In the silence and solitude, he reclaims the direction of his mission. When the disciples find him again, Jesus is able to tell them of the larger scope of his mission.

As for Jesus, so then for us: prayer will be the anchor in our life, especially the anchor in our activism. The time of solitude and silence in prayer will keep our life in perspective. Without commitment to the life of prayer all our works of mercy will pretty soon ring hollow. We'll become just like any other social service agency. Prayer directs us to our beginning and our end and reminds us, ultimately, of our complete dependence on God. Without it we are running on our own steam, and will lead us back to that unbalanced life we are trying to avoid.

The third and final aspect needed for a balanced life of faith modelled for us in the gospel today is the active and intentional proclaiming of the kingdom. Now, we usually limit the preaching role of the church to its ordained ministers, so that those adequately formed and prepared can bring some light to the darkness of our minds!! But it is incumbent upon *all* the faithful, *all* the baptised, *all* those who seek to follow Jesus to proclaim the good news in deed as well as in word.

We might look at our lives and think they are ordinary and incapable of great things. But every follower of Jesus is capable of being an agent of truth and light. Every disciple, if we follow the life and example of our Lord, can build his kingdom. In the love we show others, in our prayer and in our proclamation, we can make our own lives great. And we can make the world around us great as well. And in the quality of our lives we ultimately give glory to our God, from whom all good things come. Amen.