

# Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections  
based on this week's lectionary readings

February 8, 2015  
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B

**The readings this week:**

- *Isaiah 40:21-31* ◦ *Psalms 147: 1-11, 20c*
- *1 Corinthians 9:16-23* ◦ *Mark 1:29-39*

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

## A Dark and Deserted Place - a reflection on Mark 1:29-39

Imagine walking into the office, and immediately getting hit with, "Everyone's looking for you!— Where have you been?" What's your first response? What's the first thing you do?

If you're like me, the first thing you do is compile a list of who is looking for me, prioritize according to need (and influence/ prominence... yeah more on that some other time), and get to work. Perhaps even skip lunch if the list is a long one.

But, in Mark chapter 1, when the disciples tell him that there's a long line of people outside waiting to be healed and comforted, what does Jesus do? He picks up and moves on to another place.

Wow, as many times as I've read this passage, that never ceases to amaze me.

He moves on.

AND, he moves on AFTER taking the time to get up so early in the morning that it's still dark, so that he might find a deserted place to pray.

There's a part of me which finds this so very foreign that it's disorienting. I mean, there was work to do. Hurting people. Sick people. Possessed people. People who were lost, and weary, and sinking into the depths of despair.

Couldn't he have foregone the early morning prayer session and opened the office a little early that day? Couldn't he have stuck around a little while longer, and alleviated some more of the hurt in that place? Did he have to go so quickly?

I see two things going on here.

First, as vitally important to the salvation of the world that Jesus' earthly ministry was, it was not so important that Jesus didn't have time to take care of himself, and his spiritual connection with his Heavenly Father. And, if Jesus can find the time to care for his spiritual nurture, how much more can we find the time. I mean, I have an important job and all, but I'm not the savior of the world. And, even the Savior of the World needs quiet time, alone.

And, Jesus demonstrates that you don't have to do it all. You can't save everyone. Sometimes you have to move on. Sometimes you just have to pick up and go where the Spirit sends you, even if it means people are still going to be in need. Because, honestly, there are always going to be people in need.

It is disorienting, because it's a totally different way of thinking about existence, career, and ministry. It demonstrates so clearly that the world doesn't revolve around ME. Or YOU.

We are more than the tasks we accomplish.

And, that waking up before dawn and finding a quiet place to connect with God is sometimes the most important thing we can do.

*Rick Morley, [A Garden Path](#)*



# Reflecting on the Word



## 1st Reading: [Isaiah 40:21-31](#)

Since God is “Maker of heaven and earth,” is there a particular place in creation that you find yourself aware of God’s presence? If we didn’t have access to the Bible, what could we know about God by observing the world around us? What comes to mind when you think of God as Father? How can our relationship with an earthly father or stepfather impact our view of God? If you know someone with negative memories of their earthly father, how could you help them appreciate the fatherhood of God? When you pray, how can the thought of God as both “Father” and “Almighty” help you? When the tough times come, how can the thought of God as both “Father” and “Almighty” help you? [Hillcrest Baptist Church](#)

## Psalm Reading: [Psalm 147:1-11, 20c](#)

Have you ever had a problem you couldn’t solve? Have you ever faced a situation where no matter how hard you tried you could not understand it? One of the wonders of this passage is the thought that the Lord has never had this feeling. There has never been a problem too complex for him. How does this thought bring you comfort? The greater truth that this same God actually cares about each person on this tiny spinning blue marble that we call earth. God is in the business of healing broken and wounded hearts. How can this truth affect the way you tackle whatever challenges you face?

## The Number of the Stars

Every day, in so many ways, God displays His wonders and power. They are all about us, in nature, in relationships, in events, protection, blessings, etc.

The wonders of nature are always stunning, if we take a moment to ponder them. From atomic structure to distant stars, as pictured in this beautiful NASA photograph. We can touch, smell, see, taste and hear these wonders of God. All our senses can be used to observe and delight in God’s glory.

Scientists spend entire careers examining just one tiny facet of creation. Collecting all the brilliant scientific minds in the world doesn’t even begin to answer all the questions, or explain natural phenomena. Like a drop in the ocean, compared to the vastness of creation.

Yet as insignificant as we may be, “He heals the brokenhearted” according to the Psalmist in this quote. He binds up our wounds. The great creator cares about His people. He even cares about me.

Jesus stepped across His created stars, He entered the realm of time, to become one of us. To feel the joys and suffering of life on earth, he truly understands our needs. As creator, he can truly bind our wounds.

We can only respond with the Psalmist: “Praise the Lord. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!”

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## Praying Toward Sunday

Dear God, Lead me to a place where phones do not ring and loud voices all talking at once do not compete for my attention. A lonely place where I can hear myself think, feel my own calmed breathing, rediscover the inner rhythms which seek in vain to regulate my life. A lonely place where I can listen to the wind rippling through the trees or, perhaps, to the full and wise sound of stillness. A lonely place free from the cant of television and the condemnation of calendars. A place of tranquil rest and blessed retreat. Lead me there each morning, bring me back each evening, and as life moves by, let me need that place as I need air. Amen



## 3rd Reading: [1 Corinthians 9:16-23](#)

What drove Paul to the point that he would do anything for the sake of the Gospel? What passion drives you to do the things that you do? St. Paul said, “I have made myself a slave to all... To the weak I became weak, to win over the weak. I have become all things to all, to save at least some.” Explain what Paul meant by these words. How far would you go to become a “slave... servant... or become whatever people need” in order to bring the good news to them? What might you have to sacrifice to do that? [The Sunday Website](#)

## 4th Reading: [Mark 1:29-39](#)

Do you think this Gospel text was written to tell people about Jesus, the miracle worker? Could the miracles be a confirmation of Jesus’ message of salvation? What did he say was the “purpose for which he came”? Jesus as a person used every bit of energy he possessed to carry out his mission. Find examples in this Gospel for this reality. How does “Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed” fit in with his tireless effort to carry out his ministry? How close are you to Jesus in using all your energy for some purpose? What is that purpose? [The Sunday Website](#)