

Stretching Toward Sunday

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

February 7, 2021
The Fifth Sunday After Epiphany

The readings this week:
◦ Isaiah 40:21-31 ◦ Psalm 147:1-11, 20c
◦ 1 Corinthians 9:16-23 ◦ Mark 1:29-39

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

Silencing Those Demons and Beginning to Serve

Human suffering is a great way to meet Jesus. I would love to have been able to interview the crowd that followed him around during his ministry and establish what percentage of them were following because they had encountered in Jesus, some liberation from their suffering. I am sure they would make up the majority of the crowd. Another sector might be those who were in the process of being healed by ongoing encounter with him?

I like the way the New Revised Standard Version translates the action of Peter's mother-in-law after the fever. It renders "DIEYKONEI" as "she began to serve them". Do you also hear the present continuous sense to it? I love the implication that it was the beginning of perhaps, a lifetime of service?

There is also an interesting quatrain of activities as Jesus goes about his public ministry:

What is essential is balancing our lives firmly on those four legs.

- He proclaims the unconditional acceptance of God for all, to all.
- He heals the sick.
- He casts out darkness (demons)
- He retreats into prayer.

What a wonderful rhythm for the Christ following life. How often can I recall times of frustration or burn out because I have neglected to attend to these four activities in a balanced way.

As students of yoga know, you cannot only breathe in, nor can you only breathe out.

Yet we who have been blessed, healed, and who have had our darkness dispelled by Jesus. We who now serve and follow him, need to learn the potency and sanity for our own lives of Proclaim, Heal, Remove darkness, Pray. I

don't think the sequential order is essential. What is essential is balancing our lives firmly on those four legs.

Yes, I know I am avoiding commenting on why Jesus wouldn't allow the demons "who knew him" to speak. I can only speculate from the times we do hear them speak in Mark, that they speak only of themselves in the most egotistical terms. For example, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?" Mark 1:24. Can you hear the "me" in "Demon"?

For the demons in Jesus' day, and the "demons" in me now, it is always about "me".

Why me? Why do I have a fever? Why should I proclaim unconditional love? Why must I be the healer of others and their relationships? Why do I have to put up with the darkness of others? What has it to do with me? Why should I have to pray now?

That's demonic language.

That's just not the kind of language that will help any of us understand the selfless, life sacrificing Christ; let alone be healed by him and begin to serve him.

Better we don't listen to it?

If he can shut those voices up in me, I won't complain.

~ Peter Woods, *The Listening Hermit*



Reflecting on the Word



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

What are some ways that we, as Christians, sometimes try to explain God's purpose in regards to tragic events? Why do you think we so often desire to understand God's plan? Do you think the people of Israel understood why they were in exile? What difference might that knowledge have made? How can understanding our place in creation – our smallness and God's immensity – be both frightening and comforting? Why do you think Isaiah recalls God's power over the stars? What might he be saying about the people's current plight? What is Isaiah's response to the people's belief that God does not understand their situation? What is the key to persevering in times when we don't understand? What does it mean to "hope" or "wait" on the Lord? Are there any situations in your life right now that require you to "hope" or "wait" on God? What would that look like for you? [Faith Element](#)

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

For what reasons does the Psalmist say we should praise God? How are we supposed to voice our praise of God? For what reason should we praise God in light of God's attention to all creation and not just the powerful or revered? How should we find God's power in creation and in humanity? How might our "fear of God" be tied to the hope we have in "God's steadfast love"? To whom or to what should our praise be lifted? What "things" does this Psalm remind us that our praise for them is only in God? [St. John's Episcopal, Suffolk](#)

So the power of God goes forth; it moves out to those beyond the realm of institutional religious practice and worship into the house of the followers of Jesus. This is Jesus, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, who has "called you for the victory of justice" and "grasped you by the hand." This images the work of Jesus, raising us from the dead, saving us from evil, grasping us for the victory of justice, wrenching us away from the violence of evil and the shallowness of selfish ritual. There is no sickness, physical, psychological, or spiritual, that, once touched by Jesus, can stand against the power of God. And Simon's mother-in-law's response to Jesus is immediate: she rises from her bed and begins to wait on them. ...

Simon's house, run by his mother-in-law, becomes a household of God, a church, a gathering of those in need of healing and forgiveness. Some older translations use the phrase "the whole world was pressing up against the door." This is the new gathering place, the new company of Jesus. It embraces those in need of healing and those healed and grasped for the victory of justice, helping the multitudes who come to Jesus.

-Megan McKenna, *On Your Mark: Reading Mark in the Shadow of the Cross*, via Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

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

What passion drives you to do the things that you do? What drove Paul to the point that he would do anything for the sake of the Gospel? 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 Simon's mother-in-law serving Simon, James, and John and the others because she was grateful for the healing or out of obligation? What do you make of Jesus interaction with the demons? How did they recognize him? Why wouldn't he let them speak? If Jesus takes time out to pray how much more do we need to do the same thing? We typically read about Jesus praying either right before or right after a typically challenging moment. Do we follow this example? Do we pray before or after difficult situations or do we prefer to do it on our own? [Life Church](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

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

Let me seek, then, the gift of silence, and poverty, and solitude, where everything I touch is turned into prayer: where the sky is my prayer, the birds are my prayer, the wind in the trees is my prayer, for God is all in all.

...
In true prayer, although every silent moment remains the same, every moment is a new discovery of a new silence, a new penetration into that eternity in which all things are always new. We know, by fresh discovery, the deep reality that is our concrete existence here and now and in the depths of that reality we receive from the Father light, truth, wisdom and peace. These are the reflection of God in our souls which are made to His image and likeness.

~ Thomas Merton 1915-1968, *Thoughts in Solitude*