

Mark 1:29-39

IN HER 1989 BOOK, "THE WRITING LIFE," ANNIE DILLARD REMINDS US OF SOMETHING THAT IS AT ONCE OBVIOUS AND SHOCKING: "HOW WE SPEND OUR DAYS IS, OF COURSE, HOW WE SPEND OUR LIVES. WHAT WE DO WITH THIS HOUR, AND THAT ONE, IS WHAT WE ARE DOING."

THIS IS STRAIGHTFORWARD AND YET UNSETTLING. WHY? BECAUSE MUCH OF THE TIME, I'M NOT ALWAYS OVERLY IMPRESSED BY HOW I SPEND MY DAYS, AND I DON'T WANT THEM TO COUNT FOR MY LIFE. SO I TELL MYSELF THAT *THIS* DAY, OR THAT SHAPELESS BORING STRING OF DAYS LAST WEEK, OR THAT DULL SIX-MONTH STRETCH TWO YEARS AGO, DON'T COUNT. I ERASE THEM. WHAT *WILL* COUNT ARE THE DAYS I LIVE FULLY....DAYS FILLED WITH INTENTION, PURPOSE, AND MEANING. DAYS METICULOUSLY SCHEDULED AND FAITHFULLY EXECUTED. DAYS MARKED BY ATTENTIVENESS, ORDER, DEVOTION, AND BEAUTY. DIALLARD IS RIGHT. HOW WE SHAPE OUR DAYS IS HOW WE SHAPE OUR EXISTENCE. OUR MUNDANE HOURS DOING NOTHING ARE JUST AS ILLUSTRATIVE, MORE SO, REALLY, THAN OUR OCCASIONAL MOUNTAIN TOP MOMENTS. HOW WE SPEND OUR DAYS IS HOW WE SPEND OUR LIVES.

IN OUR GOSPEL READING TODAY, MARK SHOWS US A DAY IN THE LIFE OF JESUS. AS JESUS BEGINS HIS PUBLIC MINISTRY, WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO FOLLOW HIM AROUND FOR 24 HOURS, OBSERVING WHAT HE DOES, WHAT HE SAYS, AND WHAT HE PRIORITIZES.

IN TYPICAL MARK FASHION, THIS SECTION OF THE GOSPEL RACES FROM ONE EVENT TO THE NEXT, FAVORING SPEED OVER DEPTH. STILL, IF WE LOOK CAREFULLY, WE CAN FIND MOMENTS TO FOCUS ON AND LESSONS TO SAVOR. WHAT CAN WE LEARN IF WE JOURNEY WITH JESUS THROUGH A DAY OF HIS LIFE?

PLEASE HEAR ME: MY INTENTION IS NOT TO HOLD UP JESUS'S DAILY SCHEDULE AS A MEASURING STICK FOR OUR OWN. MY POINT IS NOT TO COMPARE OUR DAYS TO HIS, AND DESPAIR AT OUR INADEQUACY. RATHER, TO REMEMBER THAT REFLECTING ON JESUS' LIFE IS NOURISHING AS IT MOVES US CLOSER TO CHRISTLIKENESS, AND CLOSER TO THE COMPASSIONATE HEART OF GOD.

SO, A DAY IN THE LIFE. HERE'S HOW JESUS SPENDS IT:

HE MAKES THE HOME SACRED. OUR STORY BEGINS WITH JESUS LEAVING THE SYNAGOGUE AFTER SABBATH WORSHIP, ENTERING THE HOME OF SIMON AND ANDREW, AND SPENDING THE REST OF THE DAY IN THAT DOMESTIC SPACE. I LOVE THIS FACT. JESUS LINGERS AT HOME, BLESSING A HUMDRUM, EVERYDAY LOCATION WITH HIS PRESENCE, AND HONORING IT AS A SACRED SITE WHERE THE WORK OF GOD'S KINGDOM GOES FORWARD. THERE ARE COUNTLESS STORIES OF JESUS' MOST SIGNIFICANT ENCOUNTERS HAPPENING IN HOMES.

HOLY THINGS HAPPEN IN THE PLACES WE CALL HOME. GOD'S POWER AND PRESENCE ARE NOT LIMITED TO "OFFICIAL" SACRED SPACES. OUR HOMES ARE NOT "SECOND BEST" WHEN IT COMES TO SEEKING AND FINDING JESUS. JESUS DELIGHTS IN THE DOMESTIC. I'M GRATEFUL TO KNOW THAT JESUS DOES AMAZING WORK IN SPACES I CONSIDER FAMILIAR AND ORDINARY. WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE FOR US TO HONOR OUR HOMES AS JESUS HONORS SIMON'S IN OUR GOSPEL READING? TO ELEVATE OUR HOMES AS SITES FOR THE SACRED?

JESUS HEALS: JESUS'S FIRST ACT IN THIS WEEK'S READING IS TO HEAL SIMON'S MOTHER-IN-LAW. HEARING THAT SHE'S FEVERISH AND BEDRIDDEN, HE GOES TO HER SIDE, TAKES HER BY THE HAND, AND LIFTS HER UP. IMMEDIATELY, THE FEVER LEAVES HER BODY, AND IS RESTORED TO HEALTH. SOME HOURS LATER, THE "WHOLE CITY" GATHERS AROUND SIMON'S DOOR, LIKEWISE SEEKING HEALING FROM VARIOUS DEMONS AND DISEASES. AGAIN JESUS CARES FOR THEM AS A COMPASSIONATE HEALER, CURING MANY. JESUS SPENT MANY HOURS OF HIS LIFE OFFERING WHATEVER COMPASSION AND HEALING HE COULD. JESUS TOUCHES EVERYONE WHO REACHES OUT FOR HELP, BECAUSE TOUCH IN AND OF ITSELF IS AN INSTRUMENT OF HOPE AND HEALING. IN SHORT, HE OFFERS THE SICK AND THE BROKEN HIS STEADY PRESENCE, HIS WARM GRIP AND EMBRACE, AND THE GOOD NEWS OF A KINGDOM THAT IS COMING..A KINGDOM WITHOUT SICKNESS, WITHOUT SORROW, WITHOUT FEAR. AND HIS OFFERS ARE ENOUGH.

THE POWER OF TOUCH, OF NEARNESS, TO BRING WHOLENESS IS SOMETHING JESUS UNDERSTOOD. LOVE NOT EXPRESSED, LOVE NOT FELT, IS DIFFICULT TO TRUST. THEOLOGICALLY SPEAKING, THAT IS THE REASON FOR INCARNATION. GOD KNEW THE HUMAN NEED FOR NEARNESS. JESUS CHRIST IS THE INCARNATION OF GOD'S LOVE, WHICH MAKES IT ALL THE MORE DEMANDING TO REALIZE THAT FOR SOME PEOPLE, WE ARE THE ONLY JESUS THEY WILL EVER MEET WHEN WE SHOW THEM THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

PHYSICIAN, RICHARD SELZER HAS WRITTEN OF THE MIRACLE OF TOUCH: "I STAND BY THE BED WHERE A YOUNG WOMAN LIES, HER FACE POST-OPERATIVE, HER MOUTH TWISTED--- PALSY CLOWNISH. A TINY TWIG OF THE FACIAL NERVE, THE ONE TO THE MUSCLES OF HER MOUTH, HAS BEEN SEVERED...TO REMOVE THE TUMOR IN HER CHEEK, I HAD CUT THE LITTLE NERVE. THE YOUNG HUSBAND IS IN THE ROOM. HE STANDS ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE BED, AND TOGETHER THEY SEEM TO DWELL IN THE EVENING LAMPLIGHT, ISOLATED FROM ME, PRIVATE. "WILL MY MOUTH ALWAYS BE LIKE THIS?" SHE ASKS. "YES," I SAY, "IT WILL. IT IS BECAUSE THE NERVE WAS CUT." SHE NODS AND IS SILENT. A TEAR ROLLS DOWN HER FACE. BUT THE YOUNG HUSBAND SMILES, "I LIKE IT," HE SAYS, "IT IS KIND OF CUTE." HE BENDS TO KISS HER CROOKED MOUTH, AND I AM SO CLOSE THAT I CAN SEE HOW HE TWISTS HIS OWN LIPS TO ACCOMMODATE HER, TO SHOW HER THAT THEIR KISS STILL WORKS. I HOLD MY BREATH AND LET THE WONDER IN."

OF COURSE OUR TASK AS HEALERS IN JESUS' NAME ISN'T TO PERFORM MIRACLES. MAYBE SPENDING OUR DAYS AS JESUS SPENT HIS MEANS LIVING GRACIOUSLY AND COMPASSIONATELY IN THE HERE AND NOW. TO OFFER THE COMFORT OF OUR STEADY PRESENCE TO THOSE WHO SUFFER. TO ENCOURAGE THOSE IN PAIN TO HANG ON, BECAUSE THE WORK OF REDEMPTION IS ONGOING. TO CREATE AND TO RESTORE COMMUNITY AND DIGNITY TO THOSE WHO HAVE TO WALK THROUGH THIS LIFE SICK, WEAK AND WOUNDED--- WITHOUT CURES. AND TO MAKE SURE THAT NO ONE HAS TO DIE ABANDONED AND UNLOVED WITHOUT EVER HEARING ABOUT JESUS.

JESUS PRAYS. THE NEXT MORNING, MARK WRITES, WHILE IT'S STILL DARK, JESUS GOES TO A DESERTED PLACE TO SPEND TIME WITH GOD. THIS IS NOT A ONE-OFF; WE KNOW FROM THE OTHER GOSPELS THAT PRAYER WAS ONE OF JESUS'S DAILY PRACTICES:

IN SEEMINGLY MINOR VERSES LIKE THESE, WE SEE GLIMPSES OF JESUS' DEEPLY ROOTED SPIRITUAL LIFE, THE SOURCE OF HIS VISION AND STRENGTH. WE SEE HIS NEED TO WITHDRAW, HIS HUNGER FOR SOLITARY PRAYER, HIS INCLINATION TO REST, RECUPERATE, AND REORIENT HIS HEART. THIS REMINDS US THAT JESUS...THE CHRIST...THE MESSIAH OF THE WHOLE UNIVERSE....PRAYS, RESTS, REFLECTS, AND MEDITATES. HE NEEDS TIME ALONE. HE NEEDS TIME WITH GOD. HE IS JUST LIKE US.

AND ALSO LIKE US, JESUS UNDERSTANDS THE ONGOING AND NECESSARY TENSION BETWEEN COMPASSION AND SELF-PROTECTION IN A WORLD BURSTING WITH DESPERATE NEED. JESUS LIVES WITH THIS TENSION EVERY DAY, AND HE IS UNAPOLOGETIC ABOUT HIS NEED FOR REST AND SOLITUDE. EVEN AS THE CROWDS THROG TO HIM, HE FEELS NO SHAME IN RETREATING WHEN HE NEEDS A BREAK.

WHAT AN APT LESSON FOR EACH OF US WHO LIVE IN A CULTURE WHERE TIRELESS STRIVING IS A VIRTUE, AND THE NEED FOR REST IS CONSIDERED EITHER A WEAKNESSESS OR EXTREME SELFISHNESS. IT'S ALSO A CHALLENGE TO THOSE OF US WHO MIGHT *THINK* ABOUT PRAYER A LOT---WITHOUT ACTUALLY SETTING ASIDE TIME TO PRAY. WHEN OUR HOURS AND DAYS ARE MEASURED, HOW MANY OF THEM WILL WE HAVE SPENT ALONE WITH GOD?

AND FINALLY, JESUS MOVES ON. OUR GOSPEL STORY ENDS WITH JESUS LEAVING SIMON'S HOUSE SO THAT HE CAN TAKE THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD TO OTHER TOWNS, OTHER SYNAGOGUES, OTHER HOMES. HE MAKES THIS DECISION DESPITE THE FACT THAT HIS DISCIPLES INTERRUPT HIS PRAYER TIME TO TELL HIM THAT "EVERYONE" IS STILL SEARCHING FOR HIM BACK AT SIMON'S HOUSE. CLEARLY, THERE ARE COMPELLING REASONS FOR JESUS TO STAY WHERE HE IS. BUT HIS RESPONSE IS TO SET A BOUNDARY. TO SAY NO. TO MOVE ON IN KEEPING HIS OWN SENSE OF MISSION AND TIMING.

CAN WE LEARN ANYTHING FROM JESUS'S CHOICE? CAN WE LEARN TO HOLD CALLING, TIMING, AND NEED IN PRODUCTIVE TENSION? CAN WE TRUST THAT SOWING A SEED AND WALKING AWAY IS SOMETIMES ENOUGH? CAN WE RELINGUISH FAME AND POWER, AND CHOOSE OBSCURITY INSTEAD? CAN WE RISK THE NEW AND THE UNKNOWN? CAN WE HOLD FIRM TO OUR SENSE OF VOCATION AS DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST REGARDLESS OF WHAT OTHERS THINK? AS WE SCULPT THE HOURS THAT MAKE UP THE DAYS THAT MAKE UP OUR LIVES, WHO OR WHAT DIRECTS OUR DECISIONS? ARE WE, LIKE JESUS, ABLE TO LET GO AND MOVE ON?

HOW WE SPEND OUR DAYS IS HOW WE SPEND OUR LIVES. MAY WE, LIKE JESUS, SPEND OURS WELL. AMEN.

