

St. Mark's Episcopal Church – February 4, 2024

Epiphany 5 B – Track 2

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Gospel: Mark 1:29-39

Spread the Word

I am sure most, if not all of us have attended a tent revival or heard a tel-evangelist on TV or the radio. Often times they loudly proclaim the word of God and the good news of the salvation we find in Jesus. Others just quietly work in homeless shelters, soup kitchens, food pantries and other areas trying to help those that are in need of assistance. Which way is better? Neither and both. God is made known in many places, by many means. There is not one way that is better than another. The important part is that the word gets out and is spread. Word of mouth can be very effective.

For example, I read that Hershey Bars were not commercially advertised until about 1970. Up until that time, word of mouth and in-store displays were used to spread the word about the now well known chocolate company and its products. In 1900, when Milton Hershey started his business, chocolate was considered to be a luxury item. Not many people could afford it. Hershey turned it into a common product affordable by most people. He did it quietly, without a lot of fanfare. This is much the same way Jesus starts his ministry and healing efforts.

At the start of this Gospel reading we find Jesus at the home of Simon/Peter. Simon's mother-in-law is in bed, sick. Jesus goes to her and lifts her up and her fever leaves her and she is healed. Later that evening many sick people and those possessed with demons are brought to him and he heals them also. He does it quietly, without a lot of fanfare. But word of Him is spreading, by word of mouth.

I doubt that God has a preference for how the "Good Word" is spread. It is merely important that it does spread. The Word is in all of us and we can all share it the way that is most comfortable to us – we can shout loudly from the roof tops, or do it quietly through our actions and service to others.

Beyond the miraculous healings, this passage also unveils an essential aspect of Jesus' life: his commitment to prayer. In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus retreats to a solitary place to pray. This intimate communion with God demonstrates an important balance between action and contemplation in our own lives. In the hustle and bustle of our daily lives, finding moments of solitude for prayer and connection with God can become a source of strength, guidance and balance.

The disciples, seeking Jesus in his place of prayer, express the overwhelming demand for His presence. Yet, Jesus responds by acknowledging the broader mission He has come to fulfill. He declares, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is

why I have come.” This statement emphasizes the purpose of His ministry: not merely to perform miracles but to proclaim the message of God’s Kingdom. Spreading the word of God does not take place only from here, in a pulpit, on Sunday morning. Our actions and words can sometimes be louder and more effective. Our readings today have a message for us. They are beams from the light of God. We are called to see that light.

As followers of Christ, this passage challenges us to embody both the compassion that responds to immediate needs and the commitment to seek spiritual nourishment through prayer. Let us be givers of healing love, extending empathy and aid to those around us. Simultaneously, let us prioritize moments of quiet reflection, cultivating a deep, meaningful relationship with God through prayer. In our busy lives, finding moments of quiet reflection and communion with God can rejuvenate our spirits. Hopefully, this dual focus will empower us to carry out our mission with purpose and love, just as Jesus exemplified by embracing compassion, self-care, and spiritual connection in our journey of faith.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we come before you with hearts open to your word. We seek your guidance and understanding and trust you to inspire us to live with compassion, faith and dedication in spreading the news of your son, Jesus Christ. Help us to follow in his footsteps and provide compassionate love to all we meet, especially to those that are in need. Amen