

Taking Care of Your Spiritual Health: It's Important

SERMON Feb. 7, 2021

What a gospel reading we had today, especially as we are still in the midst of COVID-19, lacking sufficient vaccines, experiencing increasing stress about the variants of the disease and huge COVID fatigue! I wanted to yell “where are you Jesus when we need you and your healing powers? You healed others! Get back here and use your powers to cure us or at least hasten the development of a cure!” Jesus is a superhero who can do many things and yet when we need him most, where is he? Some superhero!

I quickly realized that I needed to do some research and learn more about this reading. As Bishop Susan pointed out last week, Mark is a very succinct writer and moves quickly with his story of events. He has written that Jesus visits Simon Peter, cures Simon Peter's ill mother-in-law and then sneaks away early the next morning to be alone. When his followers catch up with him, they tell him that there are others wanting to be healed and he needs to come back. They know, as is recorded in other gospels, Jesus did a tremendous amount of healing, casting out demons and other things. Surprisingly, Jesus says NO, we are moving on to the next town to proclaim the message ...not an answer many of us would expect initially. How could he just leave when so many needed him and when, like now, so many of us are looking for answers and healing from COVID?

What I read about this gospel lesson surprised me. I learned that Jesus knew from his Heavenly Father that healing wasn't the main reason for him being here. That he had more important work to do. That work was preaching the Good News, and teaching us about God and God's love for everyone and helping us understand that God was the ONLY ONE with the power to save us so we could join God in heaven! His followers had a different expectation of why Jesus was sent. It was this misunderstanding of that role that caused them to follow Jesus and ask him to return to heal others and not understand when he said NO. Yet, Jesus shows compassion for Simon Peter and the others. He understands where they are coming from and he understands their expectations. He doesn't chastise or berate them. Jesus uses love and helps them understand God's role for him and that he must do his Father's work as related in verse 38 “for that is why I came out to do” I am here to do my Father's work which is share the Good News not heal.

What are our expectations of God during these difficult times? What would we have done if asked to help someone? What are some lessons we can learn from this gospel?

Today we heard about World Interfaith Harmony and Extending our Embrace to members of all faiths. We are asked to widen our circles and to reach out to each other and connect and build relationships with each other. Sharing our stories is much like Jesus preaching and moving village to village sharing the story of his Father's love for all of us and acceptance of our differences and our similarities. All of us will be enriched as we grow in understanding and

acceptance of each other and working together to achieve more harmony and peace in our communities.

Jesus was very clear about his role and although he did a multitude of good deeds and healing, he remained true to his Father's purpose for him...to be here and share the Good News. In these times when many of us have had our lives turned upside down, we need to remember and trust in God's compassion, love and comfort and in knowing God is always there. Like Simon Peter and the other followers, we may need to change some of our expectations...Jesus may not come through our door with a vaccine to heal us but He will come through that door to assure us that we are loved and that God is there to sustain us.

Jesus went about his world connecting with people and sharing the Good News. During COVID we have all learned how important connections and relationships are...we need other people but we also need that connection with our spirituality and God. We cannot do it alone. Jesus offers the way and the truth we need to follow.

One of the biggest learnings for me is that even Jesus needed to go away, be quiet and recharge his batteries through prayer and connection with His heavenly Father. He sought out a deserted place where he could be alone and just be! Do we see the value in this? Do we make the time to do this...to just be silent and pause? To look at our relationship with God or do we try to fit it in when we have a few minutes here and there...when sitting in traffic, during a commercial break or even in the grocery line? Do we intentionally set aside time to recharge our spirituality? Do we make time to be alone with God and pray, talk to Him or just be present?

Self care is a popular topic during the pandemic. Eat right, get enough sleep, exercise, limit exposure to social media, practice gratitude, meditate...etc. We are told to take care of our physical, social, mental and emotional needs but what about our spiritual needs? Do they get attention? Are we brave enough to even address them? It is OK to look after one's self. Jesus knew he needed to get away from the people, if only for awhile. He needed to be well and at peace with himself so he could then go and help others. So too do we.

All of us need to do what Jesus did.....sneak away and find a quiet place where we can center ourselves and recharge our batteries. A time to count our blessings and listen our hearts and for at least a bit of time put aside our worries. A time to reflect on what is important to us. Jesus took that time when he left early in the morning so he could be alone, be quiet, be in tune with God and to reflect on what was really important in his life.

We don't know for sure what Jesus prayed for or what he spoke with God about. The important part is that he took the time and that is something we too should practice. Each day, look for one thing to be grateful for...it needn't be a big thing and it sounds simple and perhaps airy fairy. Gratitude helps us see what there is rather than what there isn't. True some days you may have to look a little harder for something positive. But sometimes we get so caught up in our lives and all the stress and worries that we overlook the good things and forget to show gratitude for what we have. It is surprising how positive thoughts can uplift you. There are

things we can control and things that we can't. We cannot control all that may happen in the future, but we can live in the day. Just breathe and have faith that things will work out.

Jesus knew how important it was for him to pause, to center himself and remind himself of his purpose. We too need to learn how to push that pause button. For each of us that may look different...it may be a walk, listening to music, meditation, laughter, reading...whatever works and helps you to pause and reflect. A wise person once told me the soul always knows what to do to heal itself. The challenge is to silence the mind and find the time to listen to your heart and soul. Jesus found that time.

Quiet time, prayer, meditation, reflection, whatever you call it remember it is a time to express your silent being and recharge your soul. It may be when you kneel or put your hands together and talk with God. It may be a time to think about your blessings and wishing good things for others. It may be a time when you forgive yourself and others for things you have done. It may be a time to concentrate on your breathing. Whatever way you choose, it is a time for slowing down, enhancing your inner peace and working on your spiritual well-being. So, in the coming week. Promise yourself to find that quiet oasis, sneak away and communicate with God and nurture your soul.

BLESSING:

Lord, be with us and encourage us to seek quiet time and a time to pray that we may be restored and recharged,

Support and guide us as we work to extend our embrace and enhance interfaith harmony.

Let us go forth with courage and comfort in knowing your love and compassion.