

“And There He Prayed”  
1 Corinthians 9: 16-23; Mark 1: 29-39  
February 9, 2003  
Rev. Deborah Dail  
Denbigh Presbyterian Church

### Jesus—A Man in Demand

“The whole city was gathered around the door.” People came hoping against hope that He was the answer.

“Insistent, desperate parents with sick or dying or crippled children came to seek His healing.

“Men and women, weary and worn down by the pain and debilitating effects of disease” came, too. (Doug Rumford, p. B-59, The Adventure)

The demon-possessed came, insulting Him and crying out against Him.  
“The whole city was gathered around the door.” Wherever he went people wanted something of Him. Even as he visited in Simon Peter’s home, Simon’s mother-in-law needed His healing touch.

“Help me!” “Save me!” “Deliver me!” “Heal me.” Over and over again, the cries and the needs, the demands and the earnest requests resounded in His ears.  
Jesus, even in the early days of His ministry was a man in demand—everywhere he went.

We wonder out loud: “How did he do it all?” How did he handle the constant tugs and pulls and cries of the neediest of the needy?

And we wonder out loud how in the world we are to “do it all.” In a world of tremendous need, in a world where we are daily confronted with pain, hunger, health concerns and conflict we wonder as Christians what can we do? How can we do it all?

We wonder out loud in our daily lives how are we to “do it all” as we are tugged and pulled in so many different directions. “Can you work overtime?” “Can you serve on the Committee?” “Can you coach the team?” “Can you lead the fund drive?” “Can you teach the class?” “Can you promote this cause?” “Can you sell these candy bars?” “Can you volunteer for the day?” “Mom, Dad, can you play with me?” “Can you help me with this project?” “Can you fix me supper?” “Can you take me to the mall?” “Can you take me to the game?” “Can you talk with me?”

Some bemoan over and over again that we cannot be two or three places at once. We feel tugged and pulled at every turn. Someone needs another part of us for something. How can we do it all? And how can we figure it out? Isn’t there some way we could manage to be two or three places at a time?

In the Gospel of Mark we read that Jesus “In the morning, while it was still very dark, got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon, and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, ‘Everyone is searching for you.’ And he answered, ‘Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do. And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Jesus, the man in demand, the man everyone wanted went off to himself and prayed.

He did something that appeared to be unproductive. He could have spent that time healing more people or preaching his message. “What’s this guy doing—just sitting around doing nothing? some may have said.

He did something that appeared to be selfish. “What’s this guy doing taking time to himself when everybody is looking for him?”

He did something that appeared to be impractical. “How practical is it to spend time talking to God when there are hungry, hurting people knocking at your door?”

Yet, with all that Jesus got up and went out to deserted place and there he prayed.

Moreover, when the disciples came wringing their hands and with frantic tones in their voices saying “Everyone is searching for you” Jesus calmly said we’re moving on today—to another community.

Can’t you imagine the disciples thinking and perhaps even saying: “What are you thinking? Everyone is searching for you. There are still more people who need to be healed and delivered. There are still more people who need to hear your message.” What are you thinking, Jesus?

A part of me expects Jesus to give in, to succumb to the pressure to stay. A part of me expects Jesus to apologize for being off to himself praying instead of out among the people healing and delivering and preaching. A part of me expects Jesus to at least explain himself, argue for the value of time alone, defend himself against the critiques of those who can’t understand. But he doesn’t.

One of the qualities I so admire in Jesus and of which I am in absolute awe is his ability to move from place to place, from situation to situation, from person to person with great peace, confidence and assurance that he was where he was to be, doing what

he was supposed to do in that moment. He never seemed frantic. He never seemed to second-guess himself. Even when he was criticized “Why weren’t you here when my brother died?” “Why are eating with those people?” “Why aren’t you staying in this town where everyone is searching for you?—even when he was criticized Jesus seemed confident that he was where he was supposed to be doing what he was supposed to do.

Jesus always seemed to have the right words—humor when humor was right, a sharp prophetic word, a cryptic story at times; a gentle word; an angry word. He seemed to know when it was the right time to speak and the right time to be silent. He seemed to know when to say “yes” and when to say “no.” Jesus had the amazing ability to be “in the moment” with confidence and peace. He was absolutely attentive to the one he was with in the moment. He was absolutely attentive to God’s voice saying it’s time to move on.

How? Well, give me a break, you might be saying—He was Jesus. But if we take seriously what the scriptures tell us about Jesus—that he was subject to every temptation to which we are subject, we realize that he, too, was tempted to be “tyrannized by the urgent” relentless needs and demands of others.

So how? I believe one of the answers is this: “In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.” There Jesus had a conversation with God—he talked and he listened. There he nurtured an intimate relationship with the one who would direct him and grant him peace.

Bill Hybels, one of the pastors of the Willow Creek Community Church in the Chicago area, has written a book titled *Too Busy Not to Pray: Slowing Down to Be With God*. Hybels shares his own story. “Prayer has not always been my strong suit. For

many years, even as senior pastor of a large church, I knew more about prayer than I ever practiced in my own life. I have a racehorse temperament, and the tugs of self-sufficiency and self-reliance are very real to me. I didn't want to get off the fast track long enough to find out what prayer is all about.

“Several years ago the Holy Spirit gave me a leading so direct that I couldn't ignore it, argue against it or disobey it. The leading was to explore, study and practice prayer . . . I obeyed that leading. I read fifteen or twenty major books on prayer, some old and some new. I studied almost every passage on prayer in the Bible.

And then I did something absolutely radical: I prayed.” (Too Busy Not to Pray, p. 9)

Tim Sledge, a pastor from Texas, says: “God has made us in such a way that if we do not have stopping points in our lives—times of being still before God, times of reflecting and resting—something starts to die within us. We become less human. We become less than what God made us to be. God has made us to be the kind of creatures who need to stop and refuel.”

Hybels goes on to say: “The arch-enemy of spiritual authenticity is busyness, which is closely tied to something the Bible calls worldliness—getting caught up with society's agenda, objectives and activities to the neglect of walking with God. Any way you cut it, a key ingredient in authentic Christianity is time. Not leftover time, not throwaway time, but quality time. Time for contemplation, meditation, and reflection. Unhurried, uninterrupted time.” “Hearing the Holy Spirit's leading is vitally important to a healthy Christian life. But often when the Spirit tries to get through to us, he gets a busy signal.” (Too Busy Not to Pray, p. 100, 116)

Well, if you haven't checked out of the sermon already, you may be saying to yourself as I often say to myself: setting this time aside daily for prayer is impossible with my schedule. You may be saying, this is absolutely unrealistic because from early morning till late at night (and for some of you with young children or those of you who are caregivers all through the night) "everyone is searching for me" "everyone needs something from me."

If that is the case, we are "too busy **not** to pray." One of the great reformers said that he would look at the schedule of his day. The busier the day, the longer time he devoted to prayer. If we hope to find any measure of peace amid the relentless demands on us; if we hope to escape the tyranny of the urgent; if we hope to avoid something in us dying; if we hope to be faithful to God's call in our lives over the long-haul then we, too, need to pray as Christ did.

I often ask God to make me more Christ-like. By that I mean, patient, assured of who I am and what I am to be about in the every day, more loving, more holy, more compassionate . . . the list goes on. But this week I struck again by the conviction that I cannot be like Christ in these ways, if I have not first been like Christ in his devotion to prayer.

Bill Hybels, amid pastoring a church which attracts more than 11,000 people very Sunday, became committed to spending from half an hour to an hour every single morning praying. He said: "I don't do this to earn merit badges from God. I expect no brownie points for my devotional patterns, I do it because I grew tired of leading an unexamined life. I used to try to pray and receive God's leadings on the run. It became obvious to me that the pace of my life outstripped my capacity to analyze it. I exhausted

me to be constantly doing and rarely reflecting on what I did. At the end of the day I would wonder if my work had any meaning at all. No one can become an authentic Christian on a steady diet of activity. Power comes out of stillness; strength comes out of solitude. Decisions that change the entire course of our life come out of the Holy of Holies, your times of stillness before God.” (Too Busy Not to Pray, pgs. 119-120)

Well, is this just one more thing on the list of overwhelming “shoulds and oughts”? Is this one more thing to make us feel inadequate, like we can never measure up?”

I hope not. Prayer is a powerful privilege. It’s the privilege of having a constant friend with whom we can speak and to whom we can listen for direction, guidance, hope. It’s the privilege of having one on whom we can cast our sins, our griefs, our sorrows and our cares. It’s the privilege of having one who will grant us a vision of who we are and what we are called to be and do—every day, in the moment.

This week, I would like to challenge you as I challenge myself to renew our commitment to prayer. Today, tomorrow, the next day, each day this week, let us try to set aside time—early in the morning, late at night, over lunch, some time every day to pray, to listen, to discern God’s will. You may want to write your prayers. Consider beginning with gratitude: take time every day to list specific things for which you are grateful. Take time to confess. Take time to make your requests to God. Take time to be still—to listen. Bill Hybels says that every day he starts with the word “Yesterday” at the top of a page. He writes about God’s activity in his life the previous day. Then he writes out his prayers using the categories of ACTS—Adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication (prayer requests). Then he writes “L” for listen. He then says “Now, Lord, I

invite you to speak to me by your Holy Spirit.” He sometimes asks God for direction in specific areas: “What’s the next step in developing my character? What’s the next step in my family? What’s the next step in my ministry? What’s the next step in my vocation—my job? Other questions could be: “What direction should my dating relationship go?” “What should I do for my children?” “What should I do for my parents?” “How should I further my education? “How should I plan my giving?” “What activities at school do you desire me to be a part of?”

“In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed”—even when everyone was looking for him, even when there was more work to be done, even when others criticized his choice as impractical, unproductive and selfish.

Let us go forth to pray.