

Indispensable Prayer

Mark 1:35-39

In Mark's Gospel, the passage in chapter 1, verses 35-39, is often overlooked, yet it has a great deal to teach us about the need for daily, intimate, transformative prayer.

Over the last few weeks, our children and grandchildren have returned to school and college after spring break, and some of them will graduate high school and college later this month. Their future awaits—a future full of questions and uncertainty. We, of course, want the very best for them, and we will pray for them. We will pray that each new experience, as they begin their working lives, take on post-graduate studies, or enter high school for the first time, will shape and influence them in a positive and healthy manner for years to come. We will be grateful to God as we see them grow, develop, and mature. Our prayers will often be, “Father keep them safe, enable them to have a profound dependence on You, and develop them into the person You have called them to be.”

If you had one piece of advice to pass on to your children and grandchildren in their formative years, or perhaps to a friend who is facing a significant struggle, what would that advice be?

Capernaum

In Mark 1:35-39, we find Jesus in the town of Capernaum late on a Saturday evening where a series of exciting events takes place. Envisage yourself standing in the shadows watching.

Capernaum, a city located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, was home to a garrison of Roman troops, a synagogue, and a permanent tax center, which took advantage of its location on a major trade route to the north.

Earlier on this particular Saturday, Jesus had taught in the synagogue, healed a demon-possessed man, visited the home of Simon and Andrew, healed Peter's mother-in-law who was ill with a fever, and “that evening after sunset, the

people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases” (Mark 1:32).

It is not difficult to imagine that Jesus would be mentally and emotionally exhausted after such a demanding day, especially as the “whole town” had gathered and He had healed so many. The next day, “very early in the morning while it was still dark, Jesus got up left the house and went off to a solitary place where He prayed” (Mark 1:35). Most of us, after a day of intense activity, need rest and downtime; hence we understand why Jesus goes off by Himself and prays.

Today we live in a world dominated by the ubiquitous convenience of a digital playground. Culturally we have been taught that access to ever-present smart phones highlights that value and worth are determined by how connected we are to email, Facebook, Twitter, and Google. For many of us it has become a mild obsession.

I suspect that we have become accustomed to living life at a frantic pace, struggling to discriminate between the essential and the non-essential. This can cause us to feel overwhelmed, overscheduled, and tired, with moments of deep, intimate prayer becoming little more than distant memories.

A solitary place... (Mark 1:35)

When Jesus rises early to find a solitary place to pray, He is intentional in His actions. He searches for a place with no distractions and no interruptions. A place to be alone with God. A place to unclutter His soul. A place of intimacy and devotion. A place where He can immerse Himself in the loving, sustaining presence of His Father.

We crave the same experience: a place where our souls are refreshed and renewed by the goodness and grace of God. Prayer is that place where we can bring our worries, our cares, our fears, our uncertainties, and our anxieties, and lay them down.

Prayer is also the place where we no longer have to fix everyone and everything. It is a place where we rest in God, a place that reminds us how indispensable prayer is in our relationship

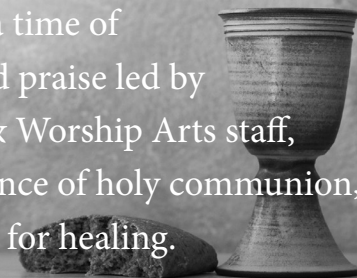
with Him. It is a place that enables us to reassess our relationship with Him, refocus on His call upon our lives, and realign our priorities to be in tune with His calling. Prayer is a place of wholehearted, single-minded focus.

Later in the morning, Simon Peter, who has been looking for Jesus, discovers Him praying in a solitary place. I imagine Peter expressing to Jesus how incredible the previous day's events were, how everyone is talking about it and looking for Him. Peter then asks Jesus to return to Capernaum, but Jesus refuses, saying, “Let us go somewhere else to the nearby villages so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”

Simon Peter is preoccupied with the now, caught up in the moment. But Jesus fully understands that life is shaped and fashioned in the quiet surrender of a selfless life, prayerfully given over to God each day. It is in the quiet, unseen moments of prayer that we are moved to obedience and holiness, enabling us to be the people God is calling us to be. This is the best possible advice we can give to those we care deeply about—advice that may well impact them for eternity!

PRAYER & PRAISE

Join us for a time of worship and praise led by the Music & Worship Arts staff, the observance of holy communion, and prayers for healing.



Tuesdays at 7:00pm
Harper Prayer Chapel

First Presbyterian Church
200 West Washington St., Greenville