**Be Still Series**

**“Be Still and Pray”**

**Mark 1. 21, 28-39**

**Introduction**

Our current series of sermon is “Be Still – Slowing Down in a Busy World.” At the dawn of this holiday season we are seeking to discover the importance of intentional time to “be still” before God. In the past week we have considered being still and have faith and being still and know that the Lord is God. This morning we come to “Be Still and Pray.” Our text this morning comes from Mark’s Gospel chapter one and we will read verses 21-22 and 28-39.

Hear now the Word of God:

***21****They went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach.* ***22****They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

***28****Immediately the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.* ***29****And immediately after they came out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.****30****Now Simon’s mother-in-law was lying sick with a fever; and immediately they spoke to Jesus about her.****31****And He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she waited on them.* ***32****When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed.****33****And the whole city had gathered at the door.****34****And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was.*

***35****In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.****36****Simon and his companions searched for Him;****37****they found Him, and said to Him, “Everyone is looking for You.”****38****He said to them, “Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for.”****39****And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.*

**A Busy Savior**

Our text this morning describes one day and night in the life of Christ. His day begins with Jesus and His disciples immediately going to the synagogue of Capernaum to teach. Immediately after that Jesus and His disciples went to the home of Peter’s mother-in-law who was sick with a fever and Jesus healed her. That evening the whole city had gather at her house and Jesus healed many who were ill with various diseases and casted out many demons. Now that was just one day! Supposedly, the day of rest! My point is that Jesus was very busy.

Maybe we think of Jesus of taking life slow and sitting around with His disciples sharing God’s Word. But that thought is far from the truth about Jesus’ life and schedule. Jesus was a busy person. This busyness of Jesus is emphasized in Mark’s Gospel by the word “immediately.”

The word “immediately” is used three times in our text and eleven times in first chapter of Mark.

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***28****Immediately the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.*

***29****And immediately after they came out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.*

As a matter of fact, God inspires Mark to use the word “immediately” 42 times in his Gospel. This is amazing when you consider that the word “immediately” is used only 12 other times in the New Testament. Biblical scholars agree that the Holy Spirit uses the word “immediately” in the Gospel of Mark to demonstrate that Jesus was no “sloth.” For Jesus there was no holding back, no reluctance, no delay, but rather a divine “immediateness” about all His work.

I think it is important for us to understand that Jesus was a busy Guy. We might think of being busy as a bad thing – maybe even a sinful thing and I guess in some cases it could be. But for Jesus being busy wasn’t a sin but rather a way of life.

In 1930 American economist, John Keynes, predicted, “our grandchildren would work around three hours a day.” His prediction was based on technological advances such as fast transportation, home appliances, and modern machinery would shrink our workday down to just a few hours a day. But of course, Mr. Keyes was a false prophet.

Between our jobs, the kids, preparing meals, home maintenance, trying to exercise and to keep personal appointments we are busy people. I know that many of you are very busy. You probably wish that you weren’t so busy but the fact is you are. But I want you to see that Jesus was busy too. Jesus wasn’t sitting around having Bible studies and going on endless spiritual retreats in the mountains. Jesus was very busy. Just look at this one-day in Mark chapter one. In the morning He was teaching in the synagogue, in the afternoon He visited and healed a sick friend, and the rest of the day into late evening was spent healing the sick and casting out demons. After an entire day, from morning till night, Jesus was busy with ministry. And then He finally was able to go to bed and get some rest.

You might think it is strange that I am talking so much about being busy when the title of this series is “Be Still.” But I know that many of you are very busy and that probably isn’t going to change any time soon. We all know that winning the lottery is more of a fantasy than a reality. So, I’m suggesting that we look at the example that Christ left us so that we can slow down in this busy world.

**Be Still and Pray**

Jesus teaches us by example that we must be still and pray in this busy world.

***35****In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.*

It seems that Jesus had to secretly slip away early in the morning while it was still dark because the city was waiting for another day of teaching and miracles. This wasn’t the only time Jesus slipped away to pray. It seems that Jesus habitually slipped away to pray. The Bible tells us that *Jesus would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.* (Lk.5.16; Mt.14.23)

Jesus practiced what He preached. He told us, *“When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.* (Mt.6.5-6) And for Jesus slipping away to this lonely place in the early morning was His prayer closet.

Prayer is the vehicle for daily dialog with the One who created us. The reformers called it a “means of grace.” What that means is that prayer is a something God has given so that we can grow in His grace. The early church devoted them selves daily to prayer. (Acts 2.42) The importance of daily communication through prayer is mentioned over 250 times in Scripture.

So why is daily prayer so important? First, daily prayer gives us an opportunity to share all aspects of our lives with God. Second, daily prayer gives us the chance to express our gratitude for the things He provides. Third, daily prayer provides the platform for confessing our sin and asking for help in overcoming that sin. Fourth, daily prayer is an act of worship and obedience. And finally, daily prayer is a way to acknowledge who is really in control of our lives. The most common hindrance to daily prayer (or excuse as some may call it) is that we are too busy. Sometimes prayer can feel like a waste of time. Surely I’m not the only one who feels like this. I’ve got a lot of stuff to do. I’ve got books that I need to read, sermons to prepare, people to meet, projects to do, and television series to binge watch. Sometimes I feel like when I’m praying I’m not doing anything. I feel like I’m just sitting around. Like nothing is happening. I need to get moving on my day and start getting things done.

For me, daily prayer is a lot like fishing. I’ve never been a fisherman. It seems like a waste of time. Waiting for hours for some fish to swim by and bite my hook seems like a waste of time when I could be doing something productive. Now, I know when I say that fishing is a waste of time the fishermen in the congregation are crying out, “Blasphemy!” “What do you mean – a waste of time?! Doing nothing?! Being unproductive?! What you are saying only proves you know nothing about fishing.” And I respond, “You’re right.” And when we say that prayer seems to be a waste of time only proves that we don’t know anything about prayer.

Someone once asked Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation, what his plans for the following day were and he answered, “Work, work, from early until late. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.” Martin Luther knew something about prayer. I also heard that Luther said that when his books and papers covered the top of his desk to the point where he could not see the grain of the wood he knew it was time to stop and have a season of prayer.

Jesus is teaching us that in the midst of our busyness we must be still and pray. Jesus slipped away in the early morning hours but we can pray anytime of the day. We should find the time that fits best into our schedule like driving to work, or before we go to bed, or the first arrive at the office before the workday starts. Sometimes we don’t pray because our prayers have become repetitious and predictable. But there are different methods we can use for prayer like the Lord’s Prayer or the ACTS acronym. This week I found some great prayer apps where you can organize your prayer requests and even send prayer reminders - Echo. I received an email “5 minutes with God in the Car Line.”

My point is that we cannot allow our busyness to distract us from prayer. We must find the ways we can slip away to a lonely place to be still and pray. Jesus was busy but He knew the importance to be still and pray. And I want to stress the importance for each of us to be still and pray in the busyness of our lives. Praying without ceasing is an attitude. Having daily prayer is an action. I want to take this opportunity to thank our Prayer Team that meets every Thursday morning to pray for our church members and ministries. I also want to thank Giovanna Southwick for her persistence to call for Christ Covenant to be a praying church.

I want to show you two outcomes of finding time to pray. Through prayer we gain strength so that we are not persuaded.

**Not Persuaded**

***36****Simon and his companions searched for Him;*

There were a lot of demands on Jesus’ life, even at this early stage of ministry. Jesus had slipped away to pray. But now the sun was up and everyone was anxious for a new day of ministry to the crowd that had gathered at Peter’s mother-in-law’s house the day before. So, Peter and his friends went to wake Jesus up but Jesus was nowhere to be found so they search for Him.

This word “search” is actually “hunted.” They hunted for Him with the intention to bring Him back to Capernaum to resume His ministry there. But through prayer Jesus knew that it was His Father’s will for them not to stay in Capernaum but to go to other towns nearby. Through prayer Jesus knew the Father’s will and His heart was fortified to do the will of God and God desires the same for us.

There are a lot of people “hunting” for you. There are people telling you to do this, or to do that, to stay late, and miss another family dinner for another business meeting. In your heart you know that you shouldn’t but you are weak because you have not fortified your heart to do the will of God through prayer. I’m not saying that business dinners are wrong or evil. I’m just saying we often know that right thing to do and don’t because we have not fortified our hearts in prayer.

Jesus wasn’t going to allow the people, even His disciples, to tell him where He should go. And through prayer we can search for God’s will and be strengthened so that we are not persuaded by other to go against God’s will for our lives and for our families.

***37****they found Him, and said to Him, “Everyone is looking for You.”*

Peter and his companions were very persuasive saying, *“Everyone is looking for You.”* Wow, I have to admit I would be very flattered if an entire city was waiting me to come and minister to them. But Jesus wasn’t going to be persuaded by their flattery. Often, we are tempted to go beyond the boundaries of God’s will for our lives but we must fortify our hearts in prayer so that we will not be persuaded. Luke records in his Gospel that they *tried to keep Him from going away from them.*(Lk.4.42c) But Jesus stood firm on what He knew was the Father’s will.

***38****He said to them, “Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for.”*

**Fulfill God’s Purposes**

For Jesus it was all about fulfilling the purposes of God – to accomplish the work that the Father sent Him to do. (Jn.17.4) And this time of prayer gave Jesus direction to know how to fulfill God’s purposes. Jesus knew that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him to preach the gospel to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, to recover sight to the blind, to set free the downtrodden, and to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. (Is.61.1; Lk.4.18) After fulfilling all of the Father’s holy will, Jesus was hung on a cross. As He hung there knowing that He had accomplished the purposes of God the Bible tells us that with His last breath He spoke these words, “*It is finished.”* (Jn.19.30) I think this is the way Jesus lived His life. Every night as He laid His head down to sleep He could say “It is finished – I have accomplished Your purposes in My life today.” And that is the way we are called to live! Whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we do it for the glory of God. (ICor.10.31)

God has given us prayer to show us His will, to fortify our hearts to do His will not our will, and to give us the confidence that we as His children are fulfilling the purposes of God in our lives. Prayer helps us to not be persuaded by the world’s demands but rather focus on fulfilling God’s purposes.

**Transition to the Table**

**Apostles Creed**

**Call to Prayer**

*Jesus got up, . . . went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.*

**Benediction**

*Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.* (Eph.3.20-21)