



**Proper 5, Year B – February 8, 2009**  
Mark 1:29-30

**A Homily preached by the Rev'd James Popham**

In Mark's gospel today, Jesus and his small entourage of apostles head for dinner at Peter's house in Capernaum. Finding Peter's mother-in-law ill, Jesus takes her hand, lifts her up, and heals her. And they all enjoy a leisurely dinner after a hard day's work.

But word has gotten around, and after dinner, the people of Capernaum show up at Peter's home with the ill and the possessed. Again, Jesus heals them and casts out demons, right there at Peter's door.

We could go there. In the town of Capernaum, archaeologists have unearthed a fourth century synagogue that rests on the foundation of a first century synagogue, likely the one where Jesus taught. The surrounding village also has been found. Perhaps, even Peter's home, where Jesus dined, and healed, and cast out demons. We could go there.

Like every good minister at that point, Jesus needs a break. So, "In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed." But, of course, Jesus is not just another minister. As Mark's gospel constantly is at pains to point out, Jesus is in constant communication with the Father. He is intimately connected to God.

We could go there.

Nineteenth Century German theologian Friedrich Schlieirmacher, considered by some "the first great theological thinker after Kant," called Christ the unique perfection of the relationship with God. Indeed, Schlieirmacher contends that, "no more perfect form of the God-consciousness lies in front of the human race." This perfection was God-given.

Thus, for Schlieirmacher, Christ is the perfection of or idealization of human nature, an essential element of which is a sense of relationship with and feeling of absolute dependence on God.

Just a century later, another German theologian, Jesuit Karl Rahner, posited God's ongoing self-communication with humans. In Rahner's view, in accepting the offer of God's self-communication absolutely, Jesus transcends his purely human nature and is, thus, God. For Rahner then, Jesus is the fully self-transcendent human and the fully human God.

How did Jesus go about staying God connected?

As spiritual counselor and author Corinne Ware observes:

"First, he seems to have alternated his exposure to people with times of retreat and intentional prayer. And, second, he appears to have been praying when he was not in retreat, even in the midst of human contact and interaction. This practice is seen most clearly in his healing encounters, It is though the first habit, that of retreat nourished the

second, which was the continuous maintaining of a consciousness that God was both in and with him." And as he did in Mark's gospel today, Jesus often retreats to a lonely place to pray, to connect and commune with the Father. ... "As [Jesus'] celebrity increased and privacy almost vanished, these times alone became necessary islands for centering himself on God."

And, indeed, we can go there, too.

But wait, you say. Look what happened. Jesus tries to get away, but is literally hunted down by his closest companions. And He always will be hounded by crowds seeking his healing touch.

And, you will agree that we do go there, too.

We are hounded no less by an unceasing pursuit of responsibilities and distractions, typically enhanced by an appealing array of self-indulgences. Life is in a word, "Busy."

And we usually have no entourage of admiring apostles with mothers-in-law to prepare our dinner.

How do we find time to connect with God?

Well, first, we are here today. To worship. To connect with God through the word of scripture and in this great sacrament of the Eucharist.

Second, we believe in a Sabbath made for people. Church is part of it, but not all of it. Whereas we do not subscribe to the strict prohibitions on work or physical exertion still observed by orthodox Jews, we still are called to observe a weekly Sabbath, to put aside our regular cares and occupations just for a day. To relax. To open our hearts and minds to that constant communication of God, free of distraction.

Third, is getting away, finding those necessary islands for connecting with God, really that difficult? Even an hour of repose at Elbow Falls might offer an opportunity for communing with the divine. And if we are really ambitious, a number of religious retreat centers in the area would provide a week or a weekend of recollection, of that constant awareness of the presence of God and God's communication to us.

Fourth, we can pray. Formally. Informally. Quietly or in community with family or friends. Centuries ago, St. Benedict formed a community around a practice of praying at certain specified times of the day, governed not by the clock, but by the sun. We need not adopt the spiritual practices of past centuries, but we may adapt them. While we might not think of setting our alarms for two in the morning to pray, we might well consider prayer when we do awaken at two or three in the morning in a moment of insomnia. And is a quick prayer during a morning coffee break any more onerous than grace before a meal?

Finally, if God is communicating with us and is present among us all the time, we must seek to dispense with the things that blur our vision of God's presence and clog the pathways of divine communication. The fancy religious

word for this is "detachment." It is no less than a rejection of a life organized around comfort, possession, and power. Perhaps, an even greater challenge than waking to pray in the dead of night.

None of this is meant to suggest that we abandon our daily lives of obligation, responsibility, or even leisure and use prayer as a counterfeit escape. But we are to introduce and include prayer in every facet and dimension of our lives. Because that is where God is, everywhere and always. And that is what Jesus so perfectly understood. Jesus never let the press of business, and who could ever say their business was more important than his, Jesus never let the press of business prevent him from making time to pray, to recollect, to open wide the pathway of divine communication to the core of his being. We can go there, too. We can strive for what Karl Rahner calls, "the immediacy with God to which all humans – *all* humans -are summoned by God in their innermost beings. We, too, can pray, just as Jesus did. And we, too, can be the Christ-like people God calls us to be.