

Isaiah 40:21-31

²¹Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? ²²It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; ²³who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. ²⁴Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. ²⁵To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. ²⁶Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing.

²⁷Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"? ²⁸Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. ³⁰Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; ³¹but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Mark 1:29-39

²⁹As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³²That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. ³⁵In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." ³⁸He 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." ³⁹And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

What Comes First for Christians

We love proverbs, don't we? I'm not talking about the book of the Bible, but rather about those short sayings that offer us truth or some advice, things like, "Two wrongs don't make a right," "the pen is mightier than the sword," "when in Rome, do as the Romans," "no man is an island," "better late than never." Proverbs offer us good counsel or truths that we can embrace. But one proverb that I always had trouble accepting and applying was, "Work comes before play." It didn't matter how many times my parents reminded me of that one, I always tended to

find other things to do before doing my homework, like play outside, watch television, telephone friends. It took me a long time to get that one down. Even in college, where one of my housemates was the manager of an arcade, I often found myself playing Space Invaders at 3 in the morning having NOT finished my reading assignments for my 9 o'clock class. I had a problem setting priorities, and while I've gotten better at doing so, I still have room for improvement.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, and I like to believe that we all are, we need to set our priorities, and we have to be very careful that we're not tempted to make the wrong things our priority. Today I want to share with you what our two most important priorities should be, and I will use this passage from Mark to illustrate. Today's passage comes immediately after the passage we read last week; if you were here you recall that Jesus enters a synagogue in Capernaum and starts teaching with authority. The next thing you know there's a guy with an "unclean spirit" ranting and raving in his midst, and Jesus commands the spirit to be silent and come out of the man, which it does, and everyone's amazed. That brings us to today's reading where Jesus and the disciples go to Peter's house, Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law, and the town folks start lining up outside the home with all the sick and the demon-possessed. After he decides to call it a day, Jesus goes to sleep, but gets up bright and early to go off and pray. The disciples come and find him and tell him that the people, presumably those who still need some healing, are looking for him. Jesus then says that it's time to move on and make proclamations to other towns, because that is what he came to do.

I imagine what God might have communicated to Jesus during his morning prayer that day. It may have seemed totally right and necessary for Jesus to remain in Capernaum and continue to heal the people who came to see him. People could have come from neighboring towns, and Jesus could have done a lot of good and earned a good reputation as a physician. He would have done a lot of good for a lot of people. But God had other plans for Jesus. He would not remain in Capernaum, and his ministry would not be focused on physical healing but rather on proclamation.

Why was proclamation so important? Because the message Jesus was proclaiming was healing in and of itself. The essence of what Jesus was proclaiming was that the kingdom of God was at hand – that's NOT to say that there was going to be some imminent cataclysm, that God was going to come and smite all those who weren't playing by the rules; no, Jesus said that the kingdom of God had arrived in him and in those who chose to follow him. Outwardly the world looked the same, but for those who would embrace what Jesus proclaimed, the world would suddenly look different, because the kingdom of God was taking shape *within* them.

You see, in declaring the coming of God's kingdom Jesus said that we have to do something to make it real to us; we have to repent. We have to take a good, hard look at ourselves and realize that we're going in the wrong direction. We need to pull the car over, look at the map, and then turn around and start heading in the right direction. This is the first step that anyone needs to take if they wish to be a Christian. We need to repent and start following Jesus. When we turn away from sin and evil and instead face our Savior, we see the world in a different light,

and as we experience God's love and grace working within us, we realize that the kingdom of God really does exist within us.

And we are called to proclaim that very kingdom; we can't really help it because that kingdom just spills out of us. The love and the healing that we experience is shared with those around us so that it actually starts to re-shape the world around us. Love begets love, and starts to define the community in which we dwell.

Now these two mandates for a Christian, repentance and proclamation, are very easily neglected. There are too many Christians who think that being a Christian is all about being a nice person. The problem is that we can all define ourselves as nice people by our own human standards, and those standards fall far short of God's standards, so that our works of kindness have limits. One of those limits is that we avoid proclamation, perhaps out of embarrassment, and perhaps because we're not so sure ourselves about the message we proclaim. If we truly desire God's kingdom to come on earth, we have to live according to *his* standards, which means we have to repent. We have to be on the path that God wants us to walk down, which means we have to follow Jesus. When we follow Jesus, when we live the life he calls us to live, we are kingdom-dwellers. And when we see how beautiful that kingdom is, and how God's desire is that everyone dwell in that beautiful kingdom of love and peace and justice, then we are inspired to proclaim that kingdom and invite others to follow Jesus Christ.

Jesus recognized that spiritual health is far more important than physical health. He also recognized that God had sent him to save the world, not just the city of Capernaum. Christians must continue that ministry to a world that desperately needs to know the beauty of God's kingdom and the joy of dwelling therein. May God continue to transform each of us, and inspire of each of us to proclaim Christ's reign in this world.