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Who is Jesus? – Ministry of Healing and Teaching

Isaiah 40: 28-31

Have 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. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but 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

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

That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And 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. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he 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." 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.

Since Christmas, we've been on a journey with Jesus, learning more about him and what he can teach us – even today – about God and ourselves as people of faith. Through baptism, claiming of an identity, the calling of the disciples, the first exorcism, and now today's reading, full of teaching, healing, and traveling, we've come to see Jesus through Mark's eyes – as a man on a mission, called to bring healing and hope to all people.

In this morning's reading, there is a lot going on. We pick up right where we left off last week, in the synagogue following a day of preaching, teaching, and performing his first exorcism. As soon as

they leave the synagogue, they go back to Simon and Andrew's house and Jesus doesn't even have a chance to put his feet up before diving into his next ministry task... healing Simon's mother-in-law. I know when I get home from leading worship on Sundays, I am **exhausted** and in need of rest. I know a lot of clergy who take Sunday afternoon naps, taking the much needed time for rest and rejuvenation. But Jesus gets back from pouring his energy into his preaching and teaching and immediately someone one needs him, so he reaches out offering healing, and the fever immediately leaves her and she gets up and starts serving him.

Ok, so ONE more task on a Sunday, that's understandable, but did you catch what the scripture says next? *"That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door."* We tend to breeze over this, but think about what that might have been like. Right outside the house, a huge crowd with all these different kinds of ailments. You can almost hear the commotion, those who were moaning from pain and discomfort, their loved ones clamoring to get Jesus' attention. You can imagine the people talking to themselves, spinning out of control, some seeking relief for themselves, and others for their friends and family. Into the chaos, even after a long day, Jesus brings healing.

When you think about the craziness of that situation and all the demands in that moment, you can imagine how draining that must have been! Especially at the end of long day of teaching in the synagogue, casting out an unclean spirit, and healing Simon's mother-in-law. I would be ready for a day off! But Jesus knows that his work is not yet done... we hear that the very next morning, Jesus is feeling the tug to travel to the next town and do it all again! There are **more** people to be healed, **more** people to share a message of hope with. **More** from Jesus would be demanded...

Do you ever feel like that? Like people want or need **more** from you than you might have to give? Like there are not enough hours in the day and days in the week to get it all done? *What do YOU do when the chaos gets to be too much?* I hear so many people who are being stretched between work and family, between parents and children, between self-care and servanthood, and as our to-do lists gets longer and longer, it just becomes more chaotic. *What do YOU do when the chaos gets to be too much?*

I know what Jesus did! You might have missed it amid all that was going on in our scripture today... There's one little line, in between Jesus' healing that evening and talk of moving on to the next town? *"In the morning while it was still dark, he got up and went to a desert place."* A place empty of all the demands and people, and there he empties himself to the One who could fill him back up. He prayed in that quiet, deserted place, and he reconnected with his source of life and light, and readied himself to go back out to face the chaos once more. We heard about this renewal from the prophet Isaiah, *"even youths will faint and grow weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength."* Jesus who faced the chaos of our world and brought healing and hope, made time to just **get away** to a deserted place to reconnect with God, so he could renew his strength and go back out and offer the best of himself to others day after day. And that was a rhythm for him. In the Gospel of Luke we have all of these passages where Jesus would work really hard, and then go away to pray, to be restored and renewed. We see it when Jesus is just starting out in ministry, and then goes off to the desert. And then he heals a bunch of people, and goes up to the mountain. And then he feeds 5,000 and scoots off to pray. He gives all of himself to others, but he makes sure to rest and pray before he goes back out again. And I believe he wants that for us too! To be renewed in spirit so we can give our all, without grumbling or complaint of exhaustion.

I'd like to lift up this pattern as our epiphany, a-ha! – for us today.... That even Jesus, the Son of God, Son of Man, master teacher and healer NEEDED A BREAK! and so do we! We need to find a rhythm that works for us to slow down the pace, remove ourselves from the chaos of life, and center our hearts and spirits on God. This pattern of practicing self-care is so important, because the problems we face in life don't just go away after we solve one... just as Jesus faced more, so do we. It's not only ok to take time to renew and rejuvenate, it's NECESSARY. To be still for a moment, be empty, and take care of you. All work and no play not only makes us dull, but it is dangerous. It can suck the joy out of life and burn us out, so that our servanthood, our care for others, our loving actions, become cold, impersonal, and even done with regret or spite, because there's just no more within us to give... our well has run dry because we haven't taken the time to allow God to fill us back up.

Many of us are not aware of the signs of how fatigued we may not be. Fatigue does not always show itself in outright tiredness. It can be manifested as anxiety, nervousness, restlessness, absent mindedness, clumsiness, annoyance, exasperation, odd aches and pains, and loss of appetite. Any of that sound familiar? All of these happen to us when we drive and drive and drive and we can no longer function. I see it in me and I see it in people around me. So I ask, are we taking time to empty ourselves and allow God to fill and renew us? Are you making time to quiet the chaos of life, to find a deserted place and pray? If not, what's holding you back? Even God took a Sabbath rest, Jesus took a break to pray... you surely deserve and NEED the time to breathe in the Spirit of the Lord, to fill up your soul... Is today the day?

It is my prayer that each one of us would know that joy of renewal. That we might experience the overflowing of God's sustaining Spirit carrying us through. And as Jesus did over and over again, we might live into a rhythm of work and prayer so that the prophet Isaiah's words ring true in our lives, *"They who wait on 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."* May it be so. Amen.