

Trust God's Grace, Power and Wisdom 2021
 Psalm 46:46:1-3, 10-11 Mark 1:29-39

Psalm 46:1-3, 10-11 (New Revised Standard Version)

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. "Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth." The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Mark 1:29-39 (New Revised Standard Version)

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.

In the passage we read from Mark last week,
 the people were amazed that Jesus taught with such authority,
 and astonished that he had authority and power
 to command obedience from an unclean spirit.

The story continues when Jesus leaves the synagogue
 and heals Simon's mother-in-law who was in bed with a fever, vs. 31.

He (Jesus) came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

Typical of Mark's Gospel in particular,
 the author is doing far more than just telling a story.

Each phrase is intend to go deeper by revealing who Jesus is,
 & to describe **the process of responding to grace & coming to faith.**

Let me explain how each phrase goes beyond the literal.

1st Jesus came to her -

Notice that the action begins with Jesus coming to the woman.

He is taken the initiative, just as Jesus came seeking the lost.

Nothing in the text mentions expressing any prior faith,
 or that she even believed or trusted Jesus could heal her.

Healing was all done by Jesus she contributed nothing but the fever.

2nd He took her by the hand -

This is an image of gentle compassion and comfort.

She was a passive receiver of his healing grace.

3rd He lifted her up -

Jesus provided the strength, support and help she needed,
just as healing comes to us when the Lord lifts us up.

4th the fever left her -

The passage doesn't mention Jesus or her saying anything.
It's done without explanation, it's a gracious healing,
that set her free from her illness and disease.

5th she began to serve -

Serving is a clear sign that she's recovered completely,
and responding to the grace of Jesus having healed her,
she offers her gratitude, using her gifts **by serving**...
... just as we live into God's grace by serving others.

This story is a picture of the process of a Christian coming to faith.

After Jesus miraculously healed Simon's mother-in-law,
word got out and all evening crowds came by for healing, vs. 33-34

"And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases..."

Try to imagine this scene of his great success in Capernaum,
and how exhilarating that must've been so early in his ministry.

- * the success of gathering a huge crowd of supporters,
- * to minister and heal so many in such dire need,
- * to be so accepted and accomplish so much good.

What a great start to get his ministry going, growing & established,
that already in Capernaum Jesus has something to build on,
and the momentum to do some very significant ministry.

So how does Jesus respond to such a rousing success? ... vs. 35-38

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.**"

Now wouldn't it seem like a good idea and most reasonable thing,
* to stay right there in Capernaum to heal and teach,
* to let the people keep coming and meeting their needs.

But, Jesus responds by finding a quiet place for listening to God,
which enabled him to stay focused on God's will, his true mission,
for as it turns out, **healing the hurting and sick of Capernaum**
was not the most important reason or purpose that Jesus came.

God's purpose and plan was far more than just medical miracles,
and Jesus came to do more than just heal the physically sick.
Instead, according to God's will, plan and purpose,

Jesus came, to bring God's salvation to all of the world.

And like us, throughout his earthly ministry,

Jesus had to **thread his way between the urgent and the important.**

Some choices and decisions are pretty easy and straight forward,
but other decisions are far more difficult and complicated,

**the challenge of choosing between several good options,
or of trying to discern God's will among many choices.**

Consider the pressure on Jesus while a man walking on this earth,
surrounded by great need with tragic cries of human suffering,

and to be able to cure, able to heal, and able to relieve.

How easily he could have been overwhelmed and distracted

by all that was going on around him, by all the needs and demands,

busy trying to accomplish it all and to meet every request.

So, how did Jesus deal with all that pressure and stress,

with all that need, with only three years to do all his ministry?

How did he choose God's will, purpose and plan

amid so much need, desperation, and so many demands?

Scripture reveals that Jesus regularly got away by himself,

to spent time **alone together with God in prayer**... to listen.

It's deceptively simple, but that is also our key and our hope,

for if Jesus needed time for prayer, how much more must we?...

... for we too we face the challenge of choices that can overwhelm.

Sometimes we need to be reminded to stop, wait in silence and listen,

to focus and pay close attention for our God in the quiet,

who loves us, who speaks to us to inspire and guide us

toward the blessings and purpose God intends for us...

... as we are assured in Psalm 46:1-2 & 10.

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ... Therefore we will not fear,
though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea ... Be still, and know
that I am God!*

"Be still, and know that I am God! That is both a command and a promise,

to be grounded in the goodness and healing purpose of the Lord.

"Be still", the Hebrew word here is literally, "to cease and desist",

to just stop whatever you are doing, listen and know I am God.

In Hebrew, the word, "know", has a very broad family of meanings,

which includes: to learn, to discover, to experience & to know me.

* *be still, **learn** that I am God*

* *be still, **discover** that I am God*

* *be still, **experience** that I am God*

* *be still, and **have a relationship** with your God*

The message to us in this

over-stimulated, overly- hectic and endlessly demanding world,
is to put on the brakes gently and slow down our pace
so we can be more aware of our relationship with Christ...
... just as we read earlier, *Be still, and know that I am God!*

*** and for us to hear what God's voice is saying,**
may mean setting aside our assumptions concerning God's will,
for God often moves in mysterious and unexpected ways.

I am constantly being surprised by how God works in our lives.
When I think there is little hope, God turns it around,
as God blesses and supports us beyond all expectations.

*** and for us to hear what God's voice is saying,**
may mean setting aside our desire to be in control and in charge,
and instead, allow the Holy Spirit to blow freely, at will,
for we can stifle the work of God's Spirit by insisting on our own way.

The call is for a quiet stillness, time for our soul to heal & restore,
to change our heading to catch the wind of God's Holy Spirit...
...taking time to refresh, to nurture & care for our **nephesh**.

"**Nephesh**" is a wonderful Hebrew word with rich meanings,
that is most commonly translated as spirit or soul.
Nephesh is the interior essence of the person God created.

It is who we are and it's the God-given and God-breathed part of us.
It is our innermost self, our passion and living-truth & depth--
-- nephesh is that which longs and hungers for God.

Our lives get so packed & filled with lots of seemingly vital stuff,
and so we are absorbed, distracted and drawn away from God,
and so our inner life, our nephesh
receives too little care, feeding and attention.

The critical command and promise from our God who loves us
is to just stop and listen, *"Be still, and know that I am God!"*

*** That's how Jesus was able to see past the incessant and urgent,
and remain focused on the truly important,
on God's intention, purpose and plan for our salvation.**

It's about having **a time and place set aside for waiting on God,**
for either we pause and allow the influence of God's presence,
or we will be influenced by something else -other things,
and that's not what God intends for his beloved precious ones.

My concern today is primarily pragmatic -our lives go so much better,
the more attentive we are to the presence of God's Spirit,
when in the quiet, we listen for God's voice and direction.

And the question is not whether God is present and speaking,
but whether we are being still enough and attentive enough to hear,

to stop and listen, **to trust God's grace, power and wisdom.**

Today, as we approach the Lord's Table for this sacrament & blessing
let's consider **our spiritual feeding**, the **nurture of our souls**
and consider **the path we are on** in this **our one mortal life.**

I suggest that today in the reflective stillness of our Communion,
we might set up our next appointment, specify **when and where**,
we'll wait in silence and pause to be **alone together with God.**

As we're promised in 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.