

**Sunday, February 8, 2015**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon - "Beginning to Serve"**

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And so it begins.

Jesus is an overnight sensation.

Having cast out the demon in the synagogue earlier in the day he travels with his companions to the home of Simon's mother-in-law.

Here, once again with just a touch, just a word, he is able to heal this unnamed woman's malady.

Writer Barbara Gray points out that to 'heal' is more than "curing."

Healing can also be interpreted "to set right or repair."

She ponders,

"Could this be what happens in some of the healing mysteries?"

Not that everyone who prays to be healed might be cured of their sickness, but that, with God's help, they might be set right. Their relationship with God might be repaired. The way might be made straight and the heart made whole again."

Mark tells us that Jesus, after a busy night of healing and casting out demons, rises early in the morning to go off by himself to pray.

I love this image.

The picture of Jesus at dawn, in a quiet place, reflecting on the activities of the day before.

Perhaps he is wondering about the power he has discovered in himself and is seeking God's guidance in how best to use it.

Maybe he is strategizing on how to leave this particular town, with so many still in need of healing, so that he might move onto the next village with his message of God's love and redemption.

I have often thought of Jesus' power being more the result of deep listening and extraordinary compassion, rather than the eradication of sickness and disease.

Jesus serves the sick and the lame by paying attention to them.

This, of course, is something that each of us is capable of doing.

Each one of us is called to serve God in this same way – that is the purpose of our existence.

If that is not our purpose – then what?

If that is our purpose, and obviously I think it is, we may need to recognize, address and overcome, or perhaps heal from, some of the obstacles that are in our way.

What part of your life might need to be mended in order for you to be able to fully commit to being a disciple – a follower of Christ?

I hope that many of you pondered last week's question, "Who Are You?" and came away with an answer that you are a beloved child of God dedicated to following Jesus.

Being a disciple takes hard work.

In today's reading the disciples are excited by the public's reaction to Jesus.

They want to maximize the opportunity to heal as many people as can make it to the town square – to demonstrate the power of this man have they only just met.

Jesus, however, is wise enough to not get swept away by the fanfare.

He knows that the healing and the controlling of demons are but examples of what he has been called to teach.

How often are we taken in by the activity – while missing the bigger picture – the meaning of a particular event?

Holidays are good examples of this.

Work is often a good example of this.

How often do we succumb to the idea that we are indispensable – that we must do everything that is asked of us without taking care of ourselves?

Jesus will leave Capernaum with many people left untouched.

He decides, after quiet reflection, to go onto the next village, recognizing that his work is not just in the tasks at hand, but part of a much larger picture.

He is called to preach, and to teach, as well as to heal.

He is an advocate for God – a witness to God's power.

It is most definitely not about him!

So how do we root ourselves in our identity as disciples?

Jesus answers this with his example of taking time in the early morning to pray.

Taking time to stop, even if it is only a moment, helps us to reorient back to our core.

On the mornings that it is too cold for me to walk, I do a half an hour of yoga.

I have a DVD that I use for instruction.

About three-quarters of the way through the program, when I am lying still on the floor, the instructor gently encourages me to “take a moment here to recharge.”

It is my favorite part of the program and I have found that it stays with me throughout the day.

I will stop and think, “take a moment here to recharge.”

Don’t you think that this is what Jesus was doing with his early morning prayer?

We will hear over and over again in scripture about Jesus taking time away to pray.

This is as much a part of being a disciple as active service.

The challenge is to learn to do this wherever you are and quickly.

It is important to be able to do it where you are, because needing to go someplace can become a deterrent.

You may be tempted to say, “Oh that would be good for me, if only I had the time to get away.”

But if you learn to do it quickly, where you are, it becomes as easy as breathing...you just do it.

If we neglect this reflective time for discernment, we will end up running around attending to tasks allowing our energy and sense of purpose to erode.

This week the Lectionary readings offer us a message of great comfort and reassurance.

All of the readings speak about God’s compassion and grace in healing, restoring and strengthening God’s people – those who wait on and honor God.

In each reading there is a clear indication of the way God meets us at our point of need in order to transform and save us.

The reading from Isaiah assures us that God will not grow weary or tired and that God will give power to the faint and strength to the powerless.

The point of course, is that you must turn to God in order to receive that power and strength.

What reassurance there is in this verse: “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.”

Our Psalm as well, sings praise to the God who heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Again, we are reminded that “Great is our God, and abundant in power, whose understanding is beyond measure.”

Throughout the readings today we are reminded of God’s amazing grace that comes to us at our point of need and restores and makes us whole.

While we can celebrate that God meets us where we are and offers us healing and restoration, we must also acknowledge that we need to repent and change to become those who sacrifice ourselves – our own needs, our own desires, beliefs and agendas – in favor of the wholeness, justice and goodness of others.

To embody the Reign of God which Jesus preached and demonstrated we need to release our self-interest and begin to step into the shoes, and the worlds of those who need to experience God’s love.

This will mean letting go of our need to be right, and our need to be comfortable and our need to control the world.

It also means acknowledging that we need God’s grace and restorative power.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, it is ok to admit that we will grow weary and faint with the work, knowing that our reward is God’s pleasure.

We can rest in the knowledge that God is with us and will raise us up on eagles wings.

When you accept this life as a disciple you will find yourself moving deeper into God’s grace and love as you experience God working in you and through you.

You will in fact, find that you are easily recharged.