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Title: We've Looked Everywhere!

Preaching: Ryan Hazen, Lead Pastor, Mud Creek Campus

Scripture: [Mark 1:29-39](#)

E-mail: [Ryan Hazen](#)

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Most of us have stories of when someone we love got lost. Our family's story happened at the Children's Museum when our youngest son came up missing. We had enjoyed the day at the museum and were getting ready to leave and stopped in the gift shop on the way out. We turned around and Matt – age 4 at the time – was gone.

We alerted the security and they jumped into action. If there's ever a good place to lose your kid, it's at the Children's Museum because this wasn't their first rodeo. Long story short – Matt liked the water table and had gone back to it to continue his fun experience there. We should have known that the lure of his favorite part of the museum would attract him to return – even without supervisory parental units.

While a pastor in Columbus, Indiana, I got a call that one of our elderly members who was in the memory care unit had slipped out the door as someone else was exiting and could not be found. Before cell phones were as prevalent as they are now, families would sometimes list the church office as an emergency contact if they were unavailable. When I got the call, I asked if they looked for him by the fountain in the courtyard one building over from the memory care unit. They replied, "NO, but we can – we'll let you know." In about ten minutes they called back to say Mr. Lentz had been located just where I said. "How did you know where he would be," the nurse asked. I told her I didn't know for sure but every time I would visit, he would want to go to the fountain so I'd check him out and we'd walk across the campus to the next building to look at the fountain. "It was where he liked to be – I think calmed him to be there," I told her.

Today, the disciples are looking for Jesus who has gone missing but that gets ahead of today's story just a bit so let's start where we left off last week. So far in this first chapter of Mark, Jesus has shown up, got baptized, fled into the wilderness, was tempted by Satan, picked four of his disciples, traveled to and taught in the synagogue in Capernaum, and healed a man with an unclean spirit. Today's passage picks up right there with events still

happening quickly, "As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John." (Mark 1:29).

We knew when Jesus called these four fishermen that they were two sets of brothers but we're getting some new information as we read further. Like that Simon is or was married. The five of them arrive at Simon and Andrew's house and Simon's MOTHER-IN-LAW is in bed with a fever. When Jesus finds out that she is ill, he takes her by the hand and lifted her up. The fever left her and Mark says that "she began to serve them."

We're not quite to the point I want to talk about today but I will say that this verse has always struck me wrong. She's had a fever, she's been sick in bed and within minutes of being healed, she's up and making dinner for the crew. Most women read this and would like to stick their hand in the scripture and smack some sense into these ungrateful men. I thought that too until this week when I read a bit more about the word "serve." Serve is translated from "diakoneo."¹ You might hear the word "deacon" in there – those that (at least pre-pandemic) served us the Lord's Supper in this place.

Sure, the miracle is that Jesus has healed her but it's more than that. Her healing is so full – so complete – that she needs no recuperation time. Simon's mother-in-law is so fully and immediately healed that she has no choice but to serve to show her gratitude to her healer. She had been set free. Like deacons in this place, they are not just serving communion, they are serving God.

The healings continue in rapid-fire succession as many who were sick or demon-possessed were brought to him beginning at sunset that night. It was a big deal. Mark says, "And the whole city was gathered around the door." (Mark 1:33). He cured many and cast out demons and – if you remember last week when we talked about the "messianic secret" – Mark tells us again that Jesus did not permit the demons to speak because they knew him. It was an exhausting day. We're still on the same day from a morning of teaching in the synagogue and healing the man with the unclean spirit, then coming to Simon's house and healing his mother-in-law, and then, at sunset, he heals many who were crowded around the door. It was a long day by anyone's standards.

THEN, we get to verse 35. Apparently, Jesus doesn't need much sleep because Mark begins the next section with these words, "In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed." (Mark 1:35). While it was still VERY dark gives us a clue that this was not just before sun up. This was what most of us would call the middle of the night. VERY dark implies the fourth watch of the night –

between 3:00 am and 6:00 am. After his first day of public ministry, picture Jesus, rising in the middle of the night, quietly getting out of the house so as not to wake the others there.

He goes to a deserted place, and there he prayed. Prayed here has a verb tense that indicates prolonged prayer. This is not grace for a meal while the food is getting cold. This is intense and extended communion with God. When the four disciples – remember in Mark, we haven't made it to twelve yet – when the four disciples get out of bed, Simon goes out to find him and he does. "Chased him down," is the way you can translate the Greek word. That means he abruptly and rudely came upon Jesus as he was by himself, praying.

Peter said, "I'm glad I found you, Jesus. Where have you been? The whole countryside is looking for you. They are already up, at this hour of the morning, looking for you. You are the biggest thing to hit Galilee. You're bigger even than John the Baptist. So come on. They're all down in the valley waiting for you." Jesus said, "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." (Mark 1:38). And, with that, Jesus turned his back on the crowd, and he walked away. When everybody is looking for him, he leaves. When he is recognized, he says, "Keep it quiet." What kind of a Messiah is this, anyway?

I can't think of any institution in the world that doesn't love a crowd. That's part of the reason this pandemic has been so jarring. We can't be in crowds. We can't come together in close quarters to do anything. Only 25,000 will be allowed in 66,000 seat Raymond James Stadium tonight² to watch the Chiefs crush the Bucs. There will be 30,000 cardboard cutouts though. The church is no different. The church likes a crowd too. There isn't a preacher in the world who doesn't love a crowd. Any church attendance number at church is magnified by a factor of ten if it is being reported by the preacher. We count everybody. If the firetruck goes by today on their way to a call, I'll count the firefighters as being in worship. Maybe that's what we need - cutouts to count as attendees. Everybody wants a crowd because, in the world, a crowd always means success.

In the Bible, the crowd is what Jesus tries to get away from. In the Bible, the crowd tries to use Jesus. In the Bible, the crowd on one day will sing hosanna, and the next day will shout to crucify him. In the Bible, crowds are not necessarily the sign of success. They are most often the sign of the seduction of the world. Because the crowds intend to use Jesus rather than follow Jesus, he warns the Church, and the Christian, "What good does it do

you if you gain the whole world, and lose your soul?" (Mark 8:36). So beware of crowds.

TV personality, Phil Donahue, tells of the time that he was a young television reporter and was sent out to cover a mine disaster. It was late at night, and the temperature was way below freezing (probably a bit like this morning). The rescue team was down in the mine. The relatives were gathered at the opening of the mine, hoping for some word of hope.

Someone began to sing, "What a friend we have in Jesus." Then other people joined in, "All our sins and grief to bear." Finally, everyone, all the relatives and friends joined in, "What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer." Then it was quiet. A minister stepped out of the crowd, and said, "Let us pray." He prayed very briefly, but very eloquently, for the people gathered there, and for the safety of the miners. Donahue said that it was such a moving moment, that he got goosebumps. The only problem, he said, was that the camera had frozen because of the freezing temperature. He rubbed it against his coat with his gloved hands, until it began to work again. He went to the minister, and asked, "Would you please repeat that prayer?" The minister said, "No."

Donahue said, "I'm a TV reporter. I represent 200 stations. Millions of people will see you. Millions of people will hear that prayer." The minister said, "No." Donahue persisted. "You don't seem to understand. I'm from CBS. The whole nation will see this. The country preacher said, "No," and turned around and walked away. Donahue was dumbfounded. He had never encountered anything like this before. He couldn't understand it. He wrote in his autobiography that, a year later, it finally hit him. He realized that he was witnessing something called integrity. He said, "The man wouldn't showbiz for Jesus. He wouldn't sell his soul for TV. Not even for national TV. Not even for CBS."³

"Jesus, they are all looking for you." "Then we had better move on." If you want to know the WHO of Jesus, look to WHERE of Jesus. You won't find him among the crowds in Galilee where he is working miracles. If you want to know who he is, look in a secluded place where he can be in prayer. And what about you? If you can't be found, where will you be? Your answer to that question tells a lot about who you are.

Jesus knew in a way I all too often forget that he needed time apart. He knew that 'success' itself can be an idol that leads us to forget what we are here for, who we are called to be, even who it is we represent. Indeed, Jesus knew that he needed to be grounded again and again and again in God as he moved forward into all that lay before him. We are hard-pressed

to manage life on our own. We are revived again and again when we remember the source of our meaning and strength and hope. Like Jesus, we would do well to do what we have to do to 'sneak out before dawn' – whatever that means for us - to find the time and space to be with God.

While the WHERE of renewal with God has different definitions, it almost always has to be free from distractions. Most would be hard-pressed to talk to, and more importantly listen to, God in a rock concert, while watching TV or while overseeing online learning of your student. Another thing, we can't listen to God when we're yelling at one another. Like our physical health will be better with proper diet and exercise, our spiritual and emotional health will be better by intentionally seeking out time apart.

We would do well to find a place apart not only when life's circumstances force us, like when we're scared or facing a health challenge, but every day amid all that life has to offer. We would do well to pause every day for a time apart to be renewed and strengthened and reminded of what matters to God whose people we are called to serve in the first place.

The disciples were just getting acquainted with Jesus but over time, even when Mark wants to go quickly and get places immediately, they'll come to know that when they can't find Jesus, they'll look for a quiet place. That's where Jesus will be – out of the spotlight of the crowd – in intentional conversation with God. If you want to know WHO Jesus is, look to WHERE Jesus is – in quiet places in prayer, connecting with the outcasts of society, healing the ills of the world, on a cross near Jerusalem.

Where should I look for you?

¹ Commentary on Mark 1:29-39 by Matt Skinner, February 8, 2015, found at www.workingpreacher.org.

² Information about 2021 Super Bowl attendance from Yahoo Sports at www.sports.yahoo.com.

³ Donahue, Phil & Co., Donahue: My Own Story. Simon and Schuster, copyright 1979.