

Isaiah 40:25-31 ~ Mark 1:29-39

The Time is Now: Jesus' Call to Action (Part 3): What I Came Out to Do
 February 7, 2021 ~ Fifth Sunday after Epiphany ~ Communion Meditation
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Introduction to Gospel Reading:

Have you ever had a day or a night that seemed like it would never end? Today's gospel lesson continues the story of that very long sabbath day in Capernaum at the outset of Jesus' ministry in Mark 1. We pick up as they leave the synagogue right after Jesus amazes everyone there by healing the man with the very loud unclean spirit. And we will continue the story of what happened that evening all the way to the next morning's first light. It's a story in 3 scenes. Let's see how they all connect.

Communion Meditation:

Maybe it's because I don't live in Kansas anymore. Although I actually did live in Kansas for five years of my teenage life. Surely, it's a sign that I don't live in Ohio anymore. But this time, when I read this scripture to begin preparing today's sermon, after now living for three years in Wisconsin, the word "hunted" jumped out at me. Although I have preached at least four or five different sermons on this story, I had never really noticed that word in this story before. It's in the third scene of this triptych, when Jesus had taken himself deliberately to a deserted place to pray. And then Mark wrote, "Simon and his companions *hunted* for him." Not "searched," not "called out for," but "hunted for him." Curious choice of verb. What's up with that?

Being a relatively recent Wisconsin immigrant, this whole world of hunting is new to me. But I have learned a little about it from some of you FPC hunting enthusiasts and from our good next-door neighbor, Gene Arnold. Hunting prior to pulling the trigger, seems to involve a combination of proactive planning, (that includes careful and elaborate preparation of weapons, food and beverages, as well as your hunting grounds). And then usually, there's lots of waiting.... and waiting. You can even go for years of hunting every day of every deer season, and not see a buck or a doe. But still, you keep hunting. There may be moments (I'm just guessing here) where you start to wonder, "Why am I doing this? Will I *ever* get what I am hunting for?" Whether you are a license carrying hunter or not, we *all* know about hunting for one thing or another. As much as we try to control the thing we are hunting, we cannot.

At our "First Look" Bible Study last Wednesday, one person observed that hunting for Jesus seems to be part of a life of faith. If we are honest. Although it is absolutely true that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, at the same time we all experience plenty of time in a blanket of spiritual darkness, wondering where God is. And the longer and harder we hunt for him, we are more apt to face what St. John of the Cross called the "dark night of the soul."

"Where are you, Jesus? I need you here, right now, I know you see me in my deer blind. Why can't I see you?" Come to think of it, I guess I *am* an experienced hunter if you consider

the process of writing a sermon each week a form of hunting for Jesus. OK, where are you Jesus in this text and what do you want me to preach about it? Yes, a little trade secret: we preachers spend a lot of time waiting in the dark, too.

Here is the thing: It is while we are waiting that God lifts us up from literal as well as emotional or spiritual: death, darkness, and brokenness into wholeness and new life. From the Babylonian exile and captivity, came the uplifting prophecy of eagles' wings and deliverance in our first lesson. God was there then and is here now, not to be captured or contained, but to take us by the hand and lead us forward into the light in God's own way and time—not ours. We saw a miraculous example of this in the first part of our gospel story when Jesus "lifted up" Simon's mother-in-law by the hand. The word translated as "lifted her up" is *egeiro*, the exact same word that means resurrection. This is the first of several resurrection stories sprinkled throughout Mark's gospel, before God raises Jesus from the dead.

Resurrection is what God does. It's what Jesus does. And it's what we are called to take our part in, as well. When Simon and his companions found Jesus and told him he should get back to town and do some more healing, Jesus said, "Let us go on to neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there too." Here's the thing: "God's eternal mystery, Jesus life-giving, life-restoring LOVE cannot be captured or trapped,"ⁱ the way we hunt a deer the week before Thanksgiving. The healing grace of Christ cannot be controlled. It can be received and shared. Breathing is something we have done since the moment we were born and will one day cease to do in this body. Even while we are in the dark, as long as we are breathing, God is as available and accessible as our next breath.

You may recall the end of another very long day in our gospel story, the Third Day, what we call the "day of days" was on that began, "early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark." (John 20:1) It ended with the disciples locked away in an upper room, where the Risen Christ appears to the disciples. He comes through the locked doors and breathes the Holy Spirit into them. What Jesus asks us to do is the same. Breathe in and out; accept and let go.

What are you holding onto, that you need to let go of? What are you holding onto that you need to let go of in order to go on? 2021 continues our long year of losses. As we near a whole year of living under the COVID cloud, we too are finding our way through an exile from life as we knew it last February. Today, Super Bowl Sunday without the Green Bay Packers in it, one again—even after a great season, may feel like one more loss on top of this year of pandemic disorientation and loss. And so we go on—to the next season.

Jesus' time on earth was short. He knew if he stayed in Capernaum, he would not accomplish what he came to do. The number of days he had to live and breathe, to walk and do his earthly work, were few and fast. Our days are numbered as well. Are you doing what God has sent you out to do with your one wild and precious life? (as Mary Oliver wrote in her poem, "A Summer Day.")

Perhaps you have been hunting for Jesus this season. Your waiting will not be wasted: Trust that deep predawn darkness. Especially if you are feeling unheard or disregarded. Today, Jesus has given you a gift to nourish you on this journey. Hunting provisions. A meal where he is the host. A meal where you can touch and taste holiness. If you are hunting for that foot-washing, demon-crushing grace: it's here on tap-- right at this Table.

Thanks to Jesus, who did what he came out to do. May we do the same.

¹ Richard Rohr, *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality*, (St. Anthony Messenger Press: Cincinnati, OH, 2008) pp. 128-131.