

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

³⁸ Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Dear Friends In Our Lord Jesus,

Modern life is pretty busy. My wife can remember a time – maybe you can too – when she would go to the local mercantile in a rural area and find the farmers gathered on the porch in the summer evenings. They traded the news and jokes. For a treat, the shop owner might bring them a watermelon out of the icebox. Those farmers worked hard, yet had enough time to sit and talk. We might mourn the passing of those days but they aren't completely gone. Today we are going to do the best we can after church with our chili cook-off. Be sure to stick around! Sunday afternoons are the last respite from modern life that chews off more and more time, leaving us with less and less for ourselves, our families, our neighbors, our church. Modern life often leaves us surprised where we end up because of months and years of unbalanced living.

Which makes Jesus the more amazing. Though he lived in a slower time, he was a man with the weight of the world on his shoulders, the responsibility of billions, and look at the balance he maintained in our reading.

A Life In Balance

I. Balanced for Our Benefit

II. Balanced for Us to Copy

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We begin our reading just outside the Jewish synagogue. In Jewish tradition, the worshipers were to make all haste on their way to worship, but the return trip should be taken in slow and lingering steps (Edersheim). The worshipers were to return in the confidence and security of God's blessing.

Invited by one of his disciples, Jesus went to the home of Simon Peter. There he found a sick woman. "**So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her.**" After a restful Sabbath afternoon, evening came. So did great numbers of people from Capernaum bringing their sick to Jesus.

Someone might ask why they came at night. Were they afraid? What was it? The reason was that the Jewish day did not end at midnight or sunrise, but at sunset. You see, the Jews followed the order of creation. Go back to the beginning and there it says, "*There was evening, and there was morning—the first day*" (Genesis 1:5). This day was the Sabbath, and all work—like carrying a sick person—was forbidden on the Sabbath day. As soon as the sun set, a new day began and work was permitted. Once the sun set, they picked up their sick and full of hope carried them to a man who had healed others.

Up late that night, Jesus was the first to rise. In the first morning light Jesus quietly left the house to pray. Not a 30 second or two minute prayer like we pray. He left the town behind for serious prayer in solitude.

When his followers found him later that morning, Jesus did not return to Capernaum. Surely he would have been received well, offered meals and all the like. But he says, “Let’s go out to the little villages around here. I have not come only for the cities, but for people in all places.” And so starts something of a missionary journey.

Let’s briefly review these 24 hours of Jesus’ life: in the synagogue, healing a sick woman, healing all the sick in town, lengthy prayers early in the morning, setting out to preach in the small villages of Galilee. So let me ask a question. Why is this written down for us?

Often people look at Jesus’ life saying, “That is what we need to do. We need to be more like Jesus.” Indeed, we have much we can learn from Jesus. But more important than that, we remember that Jesus did all this to save us.

We speak of Jesus’ holy, precious blood and innocent sufferings and death. Do you ever think about the meaning behind those words? Behind those words “holy” and “innocent” is a lifetime of obedience. You cannot achieve holiness just by behaving yourself for thirty minutes. A perfect sacrifice is quite different from a credit card you can pull out of the wallet and promise to pay three weeks down the line. Innocent sufferings and death can only be offered when someone has lived an entire life of perfection. It was not 8 hours a day, but 24/7/365 for 33 years that Jesus had to be perfect.

As we watch Jesus in this one 24 hour period, be aware of what he is doing. He is living a perfectly balanced life for you and me. He is making God’s priorities his own priorities. He has the wisdom to balance the physical concerns of the people (i.e. healing) with their spiritual concerns (i.e. preaching). He perfectly balances the care he needed to take for himself in worship and prayer with the care he lavished on others as he cured the sick and evangelized them. A life perfectly lived, so that the sacrifice he would offer on the cross would be a perfect sacrifice to take away the sins of the world, your sins and my sins.

Jesus, thank you for your tireless service for me, for us, for our families, for those around us. We can never repay you, but help us to ever thank you!

II. Balanced for Us to Copy

How can we thank Jesus? The beginning point for any thanks is what Jesus does in our reading. He shows us the way that we can live so that we avoid becoming unbalanced Christians.

Back in Seminary, a friend of mine and I worked at a place that manufactured water pumps. Little water pumps for sewage and irrigation up to huge water pumps that got put on US Navy fire ships. Often my friend had a job balancing small impellers. The impeller is the part of the water pump that actually pushes the water. He put the impeller on the balancing machine, and it would tell him to shave off 0.1 ounce off this side, or .03 off that—tiny shavings. He hated that job. But it was important. If the impeller wasn’t balanced, it would wobble. Over time, it would warp the steel shaft of the motor and destroy the entire machine. It had to be balanced; otherwise unbalanced, warped, destroyed.

That is how life is, isn’t it? We always have more things to do than we have time. Anyone who doesn’t? Balancing acts are stressful. If unbalanced we get warped, or worse yet our kids get warped. We worry, stress, and worst of all, all of us in some way at some time fail.

Know that whatever has happened in your life, it is forgiven in Jesus. All the guilt of failure and unbalanced priorities, Jesus has removed it. And in our reading he teaches us how to—some of my favorite words in the Bible—he teaches us how to “*forget what is behind and... press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 3:13-14).

In our reading Jesus displays a balanced life which balances the three big things in our life: God, other people, and ourselves.

A. In our reading, Jesus started right where we found him as a boy. Remember 12-year old Jesus? He

was in the temple. Where was he in the first and last verse of our reading? In the synagogue. Even Jesus, the Son of God, spent a lot of time in public worship. It is important for us to come to worship because it is where we come to God and hear from him. When we come and listen to God's Word we hear that our sins are forgiven. Our eyes are lifted off the plastic and rusted things of this world and focused on the eternal. We are reminded what matters.

So often people stop coming to church when problems arise. How often I have heard, "When things get sorted out I will come to church." How sad I feel when I hear that! I am not angry, but sad, because the best thing for making sense of the difficulties of life is to stop sitting at home listening to our worried minds, or the critical voices crowding around. The best way to regain one's balance is to be still and worship our loving and powerful God with other Christians. The first part of having a balanced life is to make God the center of life. When God is the center of gravity, we are already most of the way to balanced.

B. Right after Jesus comes out of the synagogue, Jesus displays the second part of a balanced life. We have already heard how he healed Simon's mother-in-law and dozens more who came to his door. Jesus is not wrapped up in his own life, but in the lives of others. Which is well and good when you can turn water into wine or to give the blind sight. But what does this say to mere mortals like us? I can't do miracles.

Did you see the picture in Thursday's paper? About 20 members from Faith Lutheran Church went down to the Feeding America branch in Elizabethtown and spent a morning putting together food packages for needy people. They had their picture in the paper for doing what Christians should be known for doing – helping others. You don't have to perform miracles to help others.

We all have had people in our lives whom we most respect for this very reason. Parents, friends, teachers heavily invested themselves in you. And the more they did so, the more you loved and respected them. Though our world continually tells us to "First take care of yourself," we know that is a selfish lie.

In the Christian church, we have a special reason to help people. By showing our concern, we hope *"that they may see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven."* (Mt5:16). We want people to have eternal life, first and foremost.

But our assistance is more than an attempt to get people into church. We are grieved when fellow people, created in God's image, suffer. Poverty is real and brings a host of difficulties to life. Abuse destroys homes and lives. Natural disasters strike even the best prepared and the hardest working. People have real needs. Jesus has given us times and places and resources to help. Jesus showed us how to make other people a part of a balanced Christian life.

C. On the morning after the Sabbath in our reading, we see the final component of a balanced life. When Jesus first stirred in the morning, instead of clutching the blanket more closely and dozing off, he stood. ***"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."***

It is one of the things I enjoy about going to my study early in the morning. It is a time when I can devote myself to God's Word and prayer. It is one of the big benefits of being a pastor. Yet how often I get distracted by an email, a text message, a scrap of paper left over from the last day. I start to make plans for the new day without first committing myself to God. What a mistake!

What's so important about prayer? If worship is where we eat spiritual food, prayer is where we digest it. Prayer is where we take what God has told us and ask ourselves if we live it, if we have forgotten it, if we have blind-spots. Prayer is where we contemplate and compare what we are with God's desires. In prayer I am alone before God. In that privacy I can be honest, repent and rebalance my life.

As you leave church today, remember this day from our Savior's life. Remember that he lived this perfect day for you, for your eternity. Remember this day for it shows us how to have that balanced life that pleases our heavenly Father, and crowns our lives with blessing. Amen.