**Mark 1:29-39** January 28, 2018

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Epiphany 4

 *Mark 1:29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. 30Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. 31So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.*

 *32That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. 33The whole town gathered at the door, 34and 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.*

 *35Very 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. 36Simon and his companions went to look for him, 37and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”*

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

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Watch Jesus Work**

 Eat better. Exercise more. Spend less money. Get more sleep. Read more books.[[1]](#footnote-1) According to one survey, these were America’s top five New Year’s resolutions this year. Every one of them is a habit.

 As boring as habits are, we realize that habits are invaluable to a happy and productive life. Going around with no habits, with no direction, just doing whatever shows up on the radar screen, that is a life without direction. I mean, you can live that way. But people do better when they have a basic framework of at least a couple habits in their life. New Year’s resolutions realize that good habits make us better people. Yet habits are hard, even when we *know* they are good. “I know I should eat better, but that Death by Chocolate Brownie Sunday they make at this place… mmm-mm!”

 Our reading related several different events, all from an 18 hour period in Jesus’ life. In a way, our reading appears such a mish-mash of events that it is hard to nail the jello to the wall. Just what is the point of all these different events, one after the other? How can they all be corralled? One possible way to look at it is a collection of good spiritual habits. Jesus gives us a primer on a bunch of not just good, but great, habits. Jesus was a man of habit.

**I. Good Spiritual Habits**

**A. Worship** Try to remember: in our reading, where did we first find we find Jesus on this busy day? ***“As soon as they left the synagogue…”*** The synagogue was the Jewish place of worship. The synagogue was not the temple. There was only one temple of the God of Abraham. It stood in Jerusalem. The Israelites took their sacrifices there, and brought their prescribed offerings to that temple. Synagogues, on the other hand, were built anywhere there were ten Jewish men who had no place to worship. The synagogue had no sacrifices, not even priests. The synagogue existed especially for the teaching of God’s word. The synagogue service followed a liturgy, some of which can still be traced in our own Christian worship services over two thousand years later.

 At any rate, this is where our reading begins. Jesus has just left the synagogue in the town of Capernaum. There he gathered with the worshippers. There he taught. The Evangelist Luke (4:16) tells us that it was Jesus’ *“custom,”* his habit, to go to the synagogue. And now we remember the only known event from Jesus’ adolescent life was being at his *“Father’s house”* listening and teaching (Luke 2:49).

 What a habit! Think about it! If Jesus, the sinless Son of God made it his habit to frequent God’s house, to learn and worship there, how much more us sinful people? Shouldn’t worship at God’s house be our priority? Yet how often do we find other things “more important” than God’s house? And even when we do go, how often is it not reluctantly, wishing we could push the snooze button a few more times, or get some tasks done around the house instead of having to go to church. Don’t get me wrong. If you overcame those temptations this morning and still got here, Good for you! You fought the temptation and by God’s Holy Spirit, you prevailed. Keep on fighting those fights. Do not give in to putting God anywhere but the highest priority.

 Like all habits, getting to a worship service every week is hard, but it is what God wants. It will be a blessing, not because of what you do, but because of what God does in you when you get here. He treats you to a rich banquet of blessings; in this house you hear his word, experience forgiveness, are encouraged by fellow Christians.

**B. Compassion Ministry** The next habit of Jesus showed up after worship. For a post worship service rest, Jesus went to a house of a disciple. Simon Peter shared that his mother-in-law was sick with a fever. We don’t know why he said it. Did he expect Jesus to do something? Likely as not he was simply explaining why his mother-in-law did not come out to greet Jesus. We really don’t know. But Jesus had something that he could not keep to himself: he had the ability to help. ***“So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her.”*** This was no ordinary recovery because immediately she was up and running and ***“began to wait on them.”*** Yet, one act of mercy does not a habit make. ***“That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons.”***

 Jesus had a habit of being moved by compassion to relieve human suffering. This too is an important habit for Christians. It says in 1 John 3:17, *“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?”* Not only are we to be in church, but God wants us to be concerned about people’s physical well-being. God’s word calls our faith into question if we are not concerned about people’s welfare in the here and now. Jesus proves that by his habit.

**C. Prayer** Out of respect for the Sabbath day, Capernaum’s God-fearing people did not bring their sick to Jesus until the sun had set, and the Sabbath was over. So Jesus was up late at night healing people. I don’t know if healing made Jesus tired. Maybe it did. But being with suffering people, being concerned and compassionate about them, is tiring. Not in a bad way. It just is. After a late night of showing compassion, we see another habit of Jesus: ***“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.”***

 Have you ever done that? Sometimes it happens that I wake up at night and can’t get back to sleep. Not as often as I should, but I have discovered that this is a great time to pray! No distractions! But notice the difference with what Jesus did. Have you ever, after a late night, gotten up at 4:30am just so your could spend an hour or three praying? Jesus is so serious that he finds an out of the way place where people won’t find him till mid-morning so that he can have some extra prayer time. Other times in Jesus’ life, he prayed through the entire night (Mt. 14:25)!

 In our day and age when we are so busy with so many things, when we have information bombarding us all the time, when maybe you even have people texting you in the middle of the night, it is hard to find time to pray. Prayer is not like watching Youtube with billions of videos waiting to be autoplayed, one after the other. Prayer is work. And it is important. Again, if it was important enough for Jesus to make time to pray, shouldn’t we?

**D. Evangelism** Worship, compassion ministry, prayer… and a fourth habit: Jesus’ commitment to evangelizing. When the disciples did finally find Jesus, ***“they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for you!’ Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.’”*** Jesus had it easy in Capernaum. He was the talk of the town. He was the toast of the town. He could have eaten all he wanted at any house of the dozens he had healed.

 But this was not a time to take money, or to accept favors. (2 Kings 5:26). This was the time for proclaiming the good news that God’s promised Messiah had arrived. It was not time to sit back and take advantage of the good while it lasted. His concern for people was not just for this world, it was for eternity. So he says, ***“That is why I have come.”*** Jesus knew that he could give people even greater gifts than cancer remission, demons cast out or sight for the blind. He could connect the with God for eternity.

**II. A Savior for Habit Breakers**

 Four great habits of Jesus. Four habits we should learn.

 This is where looking at Jesus as an example gets to be a problem. Because if my goal is to be like Jesus—which is about the best thing that we could ever aspire to—but if that is my number one desire, do you know what is going to happen to me?

 I am going to feel aweful. I am going to become so aware of my shortfalls and failings. When I look at Jesus’ tireless work, his perfect devotion to God, his fulfillment of every command, his tremendous care for even people who hated him!, and if my goal is to copy Jesus, I despair.

 Have you ever had a habit that you really, really tried to accomplish, that you really, really resolved to do, and you failed?

 At first we fall short and kind of brush it off, “Just learning. I’ll get it.” But then we don’t. We keep trying, and we keep failing. And we begin to realize that we just don’t have it in us. The initial commitment becomes poisoned and even a discouragement. We feel beaten, (unless we were never all that serious about it at the beginning any way.)

 If the whole point of religion is to do good—let’s say, to adopt the four healthy habits of Jesus—the same thing happens. At first we don’t despair. We fall short of perfect service to God and we kind of brush it off, because we don’t realize how serious sin is. But if we have a clear vision of how serious sin is, and how small a fault is a filthy sin in God’s eyes, and if our whole goal of religion is to be good enough for God, then we start to despair of ourselves—and we should!

 What we need more than an example of healthy habits, what we need most of all is a Savior. We need someone to come in mop up the filth, to remove the guilt of sin. And that is exactly what Jesus is doing in our reading. Oh yes, he does show us healthy habits. And those habits are worth remembering and copying and living out. But the reason Jesus came to this earth was not to show us “how to”. His goal was to accomplish, to fulfill God’s required standards on our behalf. That is what is most of all happening when we see Jesus in his godly habits. He is fulfilling God’s law for us through his work. As it tells us elsewhere, *“Through the obedience of the one man, [Christ Jesus,] the many will be made righteous”* (Romans 5:19).

 The way we get right with God is not through four habits of successful Christians, or seven principles for highly spiritual people. It is something much more humble: faith in the work of Jesus. The focus of Jesus’ ministry was not to engender energetic do-good-ism of people determined to save themselves. The focus of Jesus’ ministry is to save us from ourselves.

 He didn’t show us great habits so that we could be saved, but he does show us and encourages us in these good habits because we have been saved.

 These four habits do not create our relationship to God, but they are responses to our relationship to God. Because we have be shown God’s grace in Jesus Christ, we gather and worship. Because we have been shown God’s grace in Jesus Christ, we show compassion to others. Because we have been shown God’s grace in Jesus Christ, we strive to regularly pray. Because we have been shown God’s grace in Jesus Christ, we tell others about him.

 These four habits of worship, compassion, prayer and evangelism don’t make us right with God. We do these four habits because God has made us right with him, through Jesus who accomplished it for us. Amen.

1. https://patch.com/us/across-america/here-are-most-popular-new-years-resolutions-2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)