

The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany  
February 4, 2018

Text: Mark 1:29-39

Theme: “Focused or Paused?”

A pause can be good. It is a time to reflect, refocus, and recharge. We can even have scheduled pauses, down time. Such pauses can make a big difference in our attitude and effectiveness. There are other pauses, unplanned and maybe not wanted. These are more the nature of interruption or distraction. Events or persons distract from the work or mission at hand. This could come in in form of emails or texts, or calls, or something that just pops into our head and we think we need to research it online right then. We have to redirect ourselves or not much get done.

I have a built in pause system on my computer right now. Seems it's doing a lot of thinking on other processes in the background instead of processing the word part. The result is at times my computer can't keep up with my fingers and my fingers aren't all that fast, not as fast as they used to be. Gives me more time to think about what I'm writing. When these pauses of the interruption or distraction variety came along the work, the mission suffers. What needs to happen doesn't.

In our text for today we see Jesus in a pause of sorts, a good one. He pauses to spend time praying. This was not unusual for Him. He goes out early in the darkness to a desolate place to pray. He was tempted to take many other pauses, those that would distract Him from His divine mission and lead Him down a path of a contrived sinful human vision. We have an example of such a temptation in our text for today. What if Jesus had paused?

We are tempted to put the eternal on pause, lose sight of the big plan, forget why we are here. So why are we here? Is it to have fun? There is a lot of fun, but that is not our primary purpose. Are we here to suffer? Now that's depressing and it's not true. There is no shortage of suffering in this world, but that's not why we are here. We are here because God put us here. We are here to have life and to have it to the full (John 10:10). There are a lot of life thieves and robbers out there—the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. God is the life giver and God is the restorer. He gives Himself in His Son that we might have life, instead of death. This is life forever with Him wonderful beyond what we can think or imagine. It is full life now as His servants.

In this world we do what we have been redeemed and restored to do. We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. These works are those that flow from loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. What about making disciples? What better way to love God and our neighbor than making disciples? Yes, this is where fullness of life is found in walking in the ways of our Lord.

But the robbers and the thieves are quite busy to distract us. The devil, the world and our sinful flesh put before us “real” living that is actually dying. It goes back to “be your own god” lie. It's all about me! I must maximize me. This means maximizing pleasure, minimizing any unpleasantness according to my own standards. The robbers are quite strong and persuasive. They even tempt us to do noble things for rotten reasons, do what is good but doing so to maximize me once more, for my exaltation. So life is a run and a race to have it my way. There is no time to pause and refocus, not even an hour or so on Sunday morning. Paused from the eternal, no worries, we'll get to that later, plenty of time.

Jesus was having a busy time in Capernaum. “Immediately [Jesus] left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.” (vs 29) This is leaving the synagogue where we saw Him last week, there driving out the demon who knew who He was. Now there are more miracles. He heals Simon’s mother-in-law. The fever leaves her at His touch. The news gets out of His presence and His power. The whole city gathers. They have needs to be met. The sick come, those oppressed by demons, those with various diseases. He meets all those needs. The demons are driven out, the sick made well and those with diseases cured. All this happened in the evening. It may have been a late night.

It looked like the next day could be more of the same. But very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus retreats. He goes to a quiet place, a desolate place to pray. His absence will be noticed. Simon and those with him (not told who or how many) seek Him out, track Him down. Simon says, “Everyone is looking for you.” (vs 37) It is as though he were saying, “What are you doing way out here? You’re missing it. There are more who need you.” “Stay here and do more healing. There is much healing to do.”

What if Jesus had stayed? Let’s carry this through a little. People continue to come—the demon possessed, those with sickness and disease, the lame, the blind, the deaf, those with issues of blood, lepers, you name it, they continue to arrive daily. Jesus heals them all, every single one, and more come. The population of Capernaum there on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee just explodes. It’s bigger than Jerusalem, bigger than Alexandria, bigger than Rome. Everyone want’s a piece of Jesus.

It would probably be good for the fishing business. There are probably not enough fisherman to catch enough fish to feed them all, not enough bread being baked either. So Jesus has compassion and feeds them miraculously. It’s like the days of Moses. People

don't have to labor for their food or scratch out a living. Food is just there for their gathering daily. The report goes out and still more come.

Jesus pauses. Jesus stays. Look at what is not happening. There are only four disciples, not Twelve. Jairus' daughter is not raised from the dead. Jesus doesn't walk on the water or still the storm. He is not transfigured before Peter, James, and John. He is not betrayed, condemned, crucified, dead, buried, or raised. "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son...who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, who still dwells in Capernaum." His life is not given as a ransom for sinners. People are still in their sins.

Look what is happening. The Romans take an interest in such a throng. They see it as rebellion and come bring violence and death. But maybe the Romans don't come. People are still coming. Those Jesus cure get sick again. Those Jesus raises from the dead die again. Everyone is still aging and all the issues that come with that. Sin is still in the world. The devil is delighted as all these people seek healing but are oblivious to the root cause of their trouble, sin. What we see is a playing out of what some wanted to happen after Jesus fed the multitude of over 5000 with those five loaves and two fish. Some of those fed seek Jesus out the next day. He says to them, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill." The day before they had wanted to make Him king by force. They saw this life of easy bread day after day just like some at Capernaum were envisioning.

If Jesus had paused there in Capernaum, it would be like changing the ending of Genesis 3. No angel is sent to block the entrance to the garden. Adam and Eve and their offspring eat of the tree of life and life forever, forever as sinful people in a corrupted creation. If our hope in Christ is for this life only, we are to pitted above all for it would be a woeful existence.

But Jesus didn't pause. "Let us go to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." (vs 37) His message is, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the Gospel." (Mark 1:15) There were healing and feedings and other signs, signs that met needs and gave witness to Jesus' authority. They were not the solution to what was ailing mankind and all creation. Jesus shares with the apostles (there will be twelve) all along what is going to happen. After moments of confession of truth, like Peter's confession about Jesus, or moments of glory, that big one of the Transfiguration, Jesus tells them that they are going up to Jerusalem, that He will suffer many things, be killed and after three days rise again (Mark 8:31, 9:31).

He does come that we may have life and have it to the full. He fulfills all righteousness. There is no pause, no deviation from the path before Him. Then the Shepherd lays down His life as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He takes that life back up again as the One who has conquered sin, death, and the devil. He defeats the robbers and the thieves. He has completed His work of redemption and is now at the Father's right hand as King of kings and Lord of lords ruling over for the sake of His body, the church.

The proclamation continues to go out. The work of the Kingdom has not been put on pause. The Apostles refused to be quiet or quieted about Jesus. Peter proclaimed there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. In our lesson from 1 Corinthians Paul says today, "Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel." (9:16) He had been entrusted with that stewardship and says, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings." (9:22b, 23) He was never ashamed of the Gospel, didn't not

draw back from preaching it for he knew it was the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.

The focus has not changed. The form of this world is passing away (1 Corinthians 7:29) We, believers, all creation groan for final deliverance, the eternal, the new heavens and the new earth. What is seen is transient, what is unseen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:18). There is no pausing on the eternal; the eternal drives the temporal.

God's plan is not put on pause. But we do well to pause to consider it. So we see Jesus, the very Son of God, going out in the darkness to a desolate place to pray, to have time with the Father. Here we see it early on in His ministry. It is not so much different than what we see at the end where in the garden He prays, "Thy will be done." He knew temptation was always at hand. Now the same Jesus who knew temptation knows our needs and our frailty. He is at the Father's right hand to intercede for us.

Do we not have need to pause to renew? Are we stronger than the Son of God? Everyday we remember and confess that we are not gods, but sinners. Everyday we remember the life that is ours in Jesus, everyday a day to remember we have been buried and raised with Him in baptism, even seated with Him in the heights of heaven. We are here now in a pause from the commotion of life in this world. God Himself is with us to forgive us, feed us, and lead us. Are we not strengthened? We remember God's promises through Isaiah in our OT lesson, "Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up on wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not be faint." (Isaiah 40:31) It doesn't matter how old or how young, this is the strength of faith that only God can and does give.

We do pause, not from the purpose, not in frustration or distraction, but to take His pure milk to be revived, refocused and refreshed. For Jesus' sake. Amen