

JESUS' REVEAL PARTY

Mark 1: 29-39

My niece and her husband were having their first child about five years ago or so. The craze then, and maybe still is, was to have a "reveal party." It was a rather fun experience for a couple during the pregnancy. It was to 'reveal' the sex of the newborn.

I made the mistake of calling it a "coming out party" and was quickly corrected that my words were inappropriate. It seemed logical to me!?! They gathered family and friends for a party at their house. They did a neat trick...they had two large English sheep dogs at the time that they asked a new boyfriend of the husband's sister - - and did not know anyone and "welcome to the family!" - - to go out to the shed with the two dogs. Out there he tied balloons on the dogs and at the right moment out the shed they bounded with pink balloons bobbing on their backs...and it was revealed that Allie was going to have a girl!

The revelation. The good news. The surprise for everyone - - and I think for the parents as well - - was the news that a girl was on the way.

Well I think we have a similar situation in our story today from Mark's gospel. Not about a newborn, but about a new mission and ministry...it is Jesus' Reveal Party...that is, Jesus declares who and what he is all about. It is found in verse 38, "For that is what I came out to do...proclaim the message and cast out demons."

For the past four weeks or so, we have been watching the 'coming out' or the "revealing' of this person, Jesus Christ, Son of God. We saw his baptism. We saw people declaring he was the Son of God. Last week, we saw evidence of his authority. This week we see his modus operandi...that is, what he is all about!

He declares he has two parts to his ministry: proclaiming the message (the Gospel) and casting out demons. He has this twofold mission. And when you stop and think about it, it is really our mission. Our purpose individually and our purpose as a

congregation. And before you get all squirrely about demons, let's look a little closer.

The story in today's scripture covers about 24 hours in the life of Christ. And it gives us a glimpse of what his purpose was. This day he starts off at the house of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever. Jesus goes in and heals her. And she began to serve.

One of the tricky things about the New Testament's discussion of fever and illness and demons is that it is hard for us to comprehend what really happened. They did not have the medical advances which we enjoy today. And we are looking at the scriptures with the glasses of the medical advances which we enjoy. And we are hard pressed to understand or appreciate their situation.

Someone today gets a fever, we simply take two Tylenol, drink plenty of fluids and go to bed. Within a day or so, it usually is gone, and we are on the mend. Life is back to normal.

Yet for the New Testament folks who could not run down to the local pharmacy and wipe out the fever, it was a serious situation. It could cause someone to lose their life. It could be deadly.

When we stop and think about it, we all have some kind of fever. It might not register at 98.6 on a thermometer. But all of us are fighting some kind of infection. Maybe not a physical infection, but a personal one or a spiritual one. As with a real fever, we sweat, suffer discomfort, are restless, lose sleep at night, and have an overall feeling of being weak and inadequate.

I do believe it affects all of us. When things are not going right. When we feel out of sorts. There is a knot in our stomach. We just cannot figure things out. But we know something is not right in our spirit.

It could be...

-harsh words we said to a friend.

-a grudge which we still hold against someone.

-feeling slighted by a fellow worker or family member.

-worrying or fretting over something or someone.

- second guessing yourself about a decision you made.
- beating yourself up because you feel helpless and unworthy.
- an inadequate relationship with God and needing that to be strengthened.
- lack of a meaningful prayer life.
- a decision you have to make this week or next week.

All of us have these times. And they are very real, and we feel like we have a fever. We feel like a ton of bricks is hanging over us. And we are not sure where to turn.

A Pastoral Care Professor in seminary, Dr. William B. Oglesby always had a saying and made his point that illnesses were functional. It did not make much sense to me at the time. All illnesses are functional? They serve some kind of purpose or function for us?

The value of his statement was that illnesses could be seen as a real gift. They could be an opportunity for us to take stock of our life and see what the message might be. They could be a time when God was trying to speak to us.

Which is contrary to our normal way of dealing with an illness or a fever. We want to fix it quickly. We want it out of our body. We don't want to be bothered with it. We just want to take two pills and fix whatever malady we might have.

And I agree we are stewards of our bodies. Our health is an incredible gift for which we need to be very careful. Scriptures teach that our bodies are a temple of God. And whatever we do to them or for them is a direct tribute or insult to our creator God. So taking care of the body is first and foremost task for us.

But, infections or fevers or illnesses can provide us with a gift: to slow us down and be still. To be a time for reflection and assessment. A chance to stop and catch our breath in this very fast paced world. An opportunity to allow God to speak to me and my situation.

So, an opportunity that is ours occurs with issues of a fever - - physical or spiritual. An opportunity to hear the voice of God.

An opportunity to let God speak to us. One advantage of a sickness is that it does slow us down. It provides an opportunity to step off the rat race we find ourselves in and to realize afresh some new possibilities. So, instead of a fever being an enemy, it may be God's voice to you.

Notice what Jesus did...in the morning while it was dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place and there he prayed. A beautiful picture for all of us about the need to be alone, to pray, to take stock of our lives, and to finally listen to God

It is hard for many of us to pray. We are not sure what to say or how to pray. We don't think we have the 'formula' down pat. We have the mistaken notion that there is an acceptable or necessary format for prayer. Yet the crucial piece of this is the time alone...quiet time...the change of your routine from your schedule to just be quiet, alone, and still.

I mentioned last week of a book I am using in class this spring. It is called "The Emotionally Healthy Leader," a book on spiritual disciples for ministers but applicable for everyone. One of the phrases used in the book spoke to me in a powerful way:

The author talks about Spiritual Deficits and gives his definition:

Our spiritual deficits occur when we lack the opportunity to be WITH God sufficiently to sustain our doing FOR God!

We become so busy doing things that we have little time to be with God. And we wonder why we run out of steam and become disillusioned in church work. We so want to DO for God but hesitate to BE with God.

I have often said that our denomination, the PCUSA, is going to be the very best Christian Social Action Agency in the country. All of which is good, but the question is 'why do we do what we do?' How are we fed in order to be sustained? How do we keep going? How do we refill our spiritual reservoirs?

Whether I have the power to do it or not, I hereby give permission to anyone in earshot of my voice to carve out a time to

just be with God. At least three times a week, a time to stop, read some scripture, meditate on some scripture, use a devotional book, be quiet, pray. There is no set formula or set of things you need to do. However, the first step is to declare the time you are going to practice spiritual disciplines.

Lent is almost on us and my challenge is that for the weeks of Lent you define three times a week (in addition to Sunday) when you will be still and come to know your God. It is often said that if something is practiced at least three times faithfully, it can become a routine in one's life. A habit even!

It is a critical part of our Christian faith. To discipline ourselves to take time to feed our souls. For without that feeding, we become empty and our 'fever' will destroy us.

Jesus took time on a regular basis. He had to spend time with his father in order to do what his reveal party declared:

- to proclaim the good news
- to cast our demons

And he did that and now our world is far different. For you see when our fever is broken - - that is, whatever is holding us back - - we are able to do as Simon's mother-in-law did - - begin to serve! Or in other words, we begin to live life fully and completely.

What is your fever? Let God's Word be healing for you and yours.