

## **Barre Congregational Church**

February 4, 2024: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, and Communion Sunday** ~

*“He went to a deserted place to pray.”*

Our services can be found on our website at [www.barrechurch.com](http://www.barrechurch.com)

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### **Scripture Reading: Mark 1 v 29 - 39**

#### **I. Introduction:**

Having a good night's rest, consuming a balanced diet, and regular exercise is essential for our bodies, our minds, and our general well-being. We feel so much better when we are taking care of our bodies and also when we have the care we need when we feel sick, so we can be restored to good health. Many of us also need time to be on our own, away from the busyness of life, to breathe, rest and restore our minds and spiritual well-being. We may find some quiet space with a cup of tea, a good book to read, and for some, meditation and prayer are wonderful ways to center the self and find inner peace. Others may find their inner peace through an activity that might be a bit more vigorous. It is, however, so beneficial to have those moments where we can find our inner selves, be restored and strengthened for the journey ahead and the things we need to do in life. While all of this is true, it is also true that many in this world do not have the luxury of having this kind of time or opportunity to find that inner peace. Many are suffering because of circumstances out of their control. This is where it is important to be reminded that Christ knows all of this and cares for all of us.

#### **II. Our Christ hard at work:**

In Mark Chapter One, we find Jesus extremely busy healing people and casting out demons. We saw Him casting out the evil spirits from the man at the synagogue in Capernaum, and so we still find Him there in the city of Capernaum, where many have been following Him and came for healing, but others were attracted to Him because of His fame and popularity for performing miracles. It was an exhausting time for Him because He was working right into the night, because so many people needed healing. He still made time to go to Simon's

mother-in-law's house where He healed her from her fever. With Him were Simon, James and John and Andrew, the initial four disciples He called to be in His inner circle.

### **III. He went to a deserted place to pray:**

We cannot comprehend the enormity of the needs people had, and how He felt the weight of their needs when they came to Him for healing and delivering from evil forces. He was a mortal being with His own physical limitations, but during the evening and during the night He was still performing these miracles. It is wonderful though, to see the example of Christ, as He got up in the morning, probably still physically and spiritually exhausted, and mentally drained, left the house of Simon's mother-in-law, and went to find a deserted place to pray. He went to pray to God, His source of strength and guidance. He needed to be renewed, and the connection with God, who would give Him what He needed in order to continue his mission on earth.

When the disciples came to urgently search for Him, because the crowd needed Him, He told them He needed to go to the other smaller villages in the surrounding areas, the ones who probably would not get the attention the urban settings received. He could have stayed in Capernaum, and let people come to Him, but He made it a point to go to them. He had just spent time with God and must have received His message from God about this next part of His mission, where to go, and whom to see and what to say. In John 5 v 30, Mark Strauss in his commentary on Mark reminds us that Jesus never did anything out of His own initiative, only what He was told to by God. So, going to these other villages was God's idea for Him to continue the mission of proclaiming the word of God, calling them to repentance and speaking about the Kingdom of God. Spread the Good News! Do not keep it in one place! Go into the villages further along the Jordan River and further inland into the region of Galilee! And that is what He did. He preached in their synagogues and drove out evil spirits. All this because He spent time with God away from everyone and everything.

### **IV. Conclusion:**

We all do the work of God here at our church, and we all have different calls and responsibilities. And we all get tired and exhausted and weary sometimes, from all the meetings and activities. But we keep on coming back, because we love our church, and we

feel the fulfillment of what we have been called to do. The example of Christ here in Mark is crucial for us, to remember to go home, or some other place of solitude, where we can restore ourselves physically, mentally, but also spiritually. It reminds us to make time with God, the One who gives us what we need, so that when we return to our place of service, we know we are in the right place inside ourselves and where God wants us to be, to love and to serve. May the example of Christ who prayed and cried sometimes in His prayers, be an inspiration for us to know our strength comes not from ourselves, but from God through prayer and meditation on God's word. May God strengthen us all today and give us what we need for tomorrow and the day after as we love and serve God and one another. Amen.