

Isaiah 40:21-31
Mark 1:25-39

Where's Jesus?
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Bill Lane in his commentary on Mark notes that Mark has Jesus praying three times in his Gospel. The first is found in our passage this morning as Jesus begins his earthly ministry; the second is in Mark 6:45 after the feeding of the 5,000; and the third is in Mark 14:32 in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to his death. Now I have no doubt that Jesus prayed more than three times in his life but for Mark these were times of pivotal importance in the life of Jesus. Times when decision has to be made or temptations rejected. We look at the first one today, Jesus' praying as his earthly ministry begins.

"Everyone is looking for you." Jesus is becoming popular. He has just begun his ministry. He has been baptized by John in the Jordan and his journey to the cross has truly begun. He has called his first disciples. He has demonstrated his ability to control the forces of evil, even the unclean spirits obey his voice. He has healed Simon's mother-in-law and now the whole city is at Simon's door with the sick, the blind, the lame. As word spreads the crowds grow. Now, early in the morning Jesus goes off to a solitary place to pray. In these moments he is alone with God. Here he finds direction for the coming days, *"Let us go to the neighboring towns..."*

Can you imagine the scene that early morning around Simon's house? As the sun begins to rise and the city comes alive the people all head to Simon's house, where Jesus had spent the night. The question is, "Where's Jesus?" I have a need. My friend has a need. We need healing, etc. The news had traveled and the crowds began to build early in the day. We could say that they are looking for Jesus for all the wrong reasons -- what Jesus can do for them. How good it would be to have a healer in the town, it would put it on the map. Help the merchants with the tourist trade.

Jesus resists the temptation to stay. There are other people, other villages and cities that also need to hear the Word. He did not come to be a healer or miracle worker. He came to proclaim the Word of God, the love of God. Remember when he came to his home town of Nazareth and went to the synagogue to worship. He read from the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah, *"The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor"* (Luke 4:18). He goes on to say that at that moment the promise of Isaiah is fulfilled in their eyes. His task is to bring the Good News, the Word of God to the whole world.

Jesus never had any trouble drawing crowds. There were always those who sought him out. In no particular order here are few instances: Zacchaeus climbs a tree to see him because he is too short to see Jesus over the crowds (Luke 19:2); a woman who is unclean because of a medical condition works her way through the crowds just to touch the hem of his garment (Mark 5:21); a man's friends tear apart a roof because the crowds are so great, so that they can lower his mat down before Jesus in hopes that Jesus will heal him (Luke 5:17). It is summed up in Mark 6:56 NIV, *"And wherever he went--into villages, towns or countryside--they placed the sick in the marketplaces."* The crowds followed.

Amazing how fast the news traveled. No cell phones, internet, etc. Just the word that Jesus was nearby brought out the crowds. Even the religious authorities responded. They, of course, were trying to trap him, catch him breaking some part of their Law. They would criticize everything Jesus said or did. They were concerned about who he ate with, whether or not he and his disciples washed their hands properly, and the day in which he healed. They were particularly concerned about the healings on the Sabbath. Talk about being hounded by the press. But even if they wanted they could not keep the crowds away.

The daily question was, “Where’s Jesus?” People wanted a miracle, wanted to be fed or to trap and destroy him. In the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel Jesus had fed 5,000 and the crowds followed. Jesus pointedly asks them why they are following him. Is it because he has just fed them and they have visions of the manna in the wilderness? Jesus knows their hearts, the reason why they are seeking him out. He preaches a sermon and as he preaches the crowd begins to go away. Even some of the disciples (John 6:66). Jesus turns and asks those who remain why they are still there. Peter responds, “***Lord, to whom can we go? You alone have the words of eternal life***” (John 6:68). Note the emphasis of Peter -- the WORDS of eternal life. Not the healing, feedings, etc. but it is in Jesus they find the Words of eternal life. As difficult as the words of Jesus were they have decided to remain with Jesus.

Where’s Jesus? Not a Where’s Waldo question (he is still popular). I am not sure Jesus would have stood out in a crowd like Waldo. Now John the Baptist would, but not Jesus. He dressed as the crowd. He would blend in. It is only artist depictions that have him standing out in the crowds, they single out Jesus so he can be seen -- sure there was no halo around his head and his clothes were not whiter than others in the crowd. In real life I imagine he would have blended in. Which one is Jesus?

What the crowds encountered was someone whose was different in the way he lived his life. Here was someone who cared. He had compassion, love, grace and understanding. He was non-judgmental and even children and women were welcomed into his presence. It was more than just the healings, the feedings -- there was something about his actions, his words lived out. He backed up what he said - he loved. He was there when the pieces needed to be picked up. He was there when love was needed. He was there when hope needed to be restored. He was where the world refused to be.

Where’s Jesus? Or, where should we be in his name? We are called to be wherever he would be -- where there are pieces that need to be picked up, where there are lives that need to be restored, where love needs to be given -- where the world refuses to go. This is where Jesus is...where we should be.

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1989