

Text: Mark 1:21-39

Theme: Staying in Love with God

Title: It's about Friendship

Day in the Life

If church work ever begins to feel a little crazy because you are so busy, all you need to do is compare your day to a day in the life of Jesus.

Mark depicts a typical day for us in this morning's gospel. It begins with a worship service where Jesus both preaches and frees a man from an unclean spirit.

After the service Peter invites Jesus over to his house for lunch, but before he can sit down to eat he must first heal Peter's sick mother-in-law. After that he does manage to eat a meal, but it's not long before he's back at work. Mark tells us:

that evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed of demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door.

Jesus probably worked well past midnight. You can imagine how tired he was when he finally got to lay his head down on the pillow.

But he didn't lay it down for long. Mark says, **"In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed."**

The place didn't stay deserted for long, though. Discovering Jesus gone, Peter and the other disciples went looking for him. When they found him, they informed him **"everyone is searching for you."** His teaching and healing had made him a man much in demand. And so, off he went, on to another village, to spread the good news there in word and actions.

A Life Punctuated by Holy Practice

A busy, busy day, no doubt like many of Jesus' days. Yet he never seemed consumed by this activity, but instead seemed always in control, if not of events then at least of himself. How did he manage that?

I think we'll find the answer by looking at where we find Jesus at both the beginning and ending of this story. The story begins with this line: **"when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue..."**

The story concludes, **"in the morning while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed."**

He began and ended his day with his attention centered on God. Indeed, his whole life was punctuated by practices which turned him toward the one he called "Abba," or Father. Practices like:

- community worship
- private prayer
- Bible study
- hymn singing
- sharing holy meals
- and fasting (giving up eating in order to focus attention)

These activities enabled Jesus to stay connected – in love – with God. And out of this loving connection came the power and passion Jesus needed to carry out his work.

Two-way Mirror

Indeed, Jesus' life was radically centered in God. So centered in God, we Christians believe when we look at him we see God in action. That's why we talk about Jesus as the "incarnation of God," God in human form.

But we also believe looking at Jesus tells us something essential about ourselves, about what a perfect human life looks like. Jesus

is a two-way mirror: he shows us what God is like and what human beings can be like at their best.

That's why imitating Jesus is the simplest and most fundamental form of discipleship. What he did, we must seek to do in order to become all we were meant to be.

Ordering Our Lives

John Wesley understood this. His "three simple rules" that we've been studying are drawn from the life of Jesus. Jesus literally embodied what it means to "do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God." Wesley knew Jesus was always the best teacher and example of the Three Simple Rules.

We've already looked at the first two rules; today we look at the third, "staying in love with God." That's not how Wesley expressed this third rule. Instead of "staying in love with God," he said we should be:

attending upon the ordinances of God such are:

- **The public worship of God.**
- **The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded.**
- **The Supper of the Lord.**
- **Family and private prayer.**
- **Searching the Scriptures.**
- **Fasting or abstinence.**

Frankly I like the 21st updating Reuben Job did to this rule. "Staying in love with God" sounds much warmer than "attending on the ordinances of God."

But there is something to be learned in Wesley's original wording. The dictionary says the root meaning of "ordinance" is the same as the word "to order."

Jesus said of Holy Communion for example, **“Do this in remembrance of me.”** And today, along with millions of other sisters and brothers in Christ around the world, we will do as we’re told.

But when Wesley talked about “ordinances of God” he had an additional meaning in mind too, something Bishop Job captures in his phrase “staying in love with God.” We are to do things like worship, Bible study, Holy Communion and prayer because they help us order our lives around God so God is at the center of our lives.

This is something most of us desperately need. So many other things compete with God for center stage in our lives: money, work, popularity, relationships. None of these things are bad in themselves, but only God has a right to be number one. **“You shall have no other Gods but me.”**

As Pascal said, there’s in each of us a “God-shaped vacuum” that only God can fill. But for God to fill it, we must direct (and re-direct) our attention to God.

And that’s really what all spiritual practices are, ways to pay attention to God. Or as Bishop Job says, ways of “staying in love with God.”

These things we’re asked to do – worship, Bible study, Holy Communion, prayer – these are the ways we show and receive love from God. These are the ways we build our friendship with the God we love.

It’s about friendship

And I think its all about friendship in the end.

In high school I had a circle of a dozen or so really good friends. I’ve kept in touch with many of these guys, but some I’ve lost touch with.

This year is my 25th high school reunion. While looking over an email about our upcoming reunion, I ran across the email address of one of

these guys, Mark. So I sent him a note and he responded. It's been good reconnecting.

But if we're serious about our friendship, it'll take more than a note every 25 years. It will take an investment of heart and soul expressed in concrete actions.

When I understand worship, Bible Study, Holy Communion, prayer and even fasting as some of the "concrete actions" I can use to renew and deepen my friendship with God, these practices make so much more sense to me. They become much more than "the things religious people ought to do," but ways for me to show love to the Friend of my soul.

And so today, on World Communion Sunday, as we join Christian sisters and brothers around the world around the table, we're practicing one of the best ways of staying in love with God. With the Table at the center of our worship, we place Jesus once again at the center of our lives. Through sharing bread and a cup, we turn heart, soul and mind toward our very Best Friend, the One who knows us best and knows and wants what's best for us.