

## ***One Long Day***

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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If you were worshipping with us last week you will remember that we were hearing the Story according to the Gospel writer Mark, and Jesus was in the synagogue. The opening of the book of Mark tells of Jesus teaching with authority, not like the other leaders, and he is interrupted by an unclean spirit in someone there. Jesus has authority over unclean spirits, we find out. Now, today we pick up where last week left off.

He leaves the synagogue, heals Peter's mother-in-law, an unnamed woman, so Mark doesn't give her a name – let's call her Deborah.

Hey wait, did anyone that Peter was married? Who knew?

But no time to lose, Deborah serves them some snacks and Jesus, and his disciples Peter and Andrew, James and John, are off, heading right into a crowd of people needing miracles.

Mark the Gospel writer was once accused by Bible scholars of being a very bad storyteller. Like a typical elementary school-aged kid, might or might not be me, writing the story of their day: "Today my mom made me breakfast, then I got dressed, then I brushed my teeth and got my coat on and walked to school, but very slowly so I was late for school and got in trouble..." You get the idea.

Bible scholars have changed their minds about Mark. They generally agree that Mark is making a point here. There was a lot to do – for Jesus and eventually his disciples when he dies – the demands for healing were great.

Jesus takes time away from the fray to pray; even Jesus, the saviour of the world, needing to recharge his spiritual batteries. I don't know about you, but I have felt like the past year has felt like one long day. Lockdown... shop only for essentials... distancing measures – while I will say that commuting only from my bedroom to my home office in my basement has been an opportunity to simplify, to focus on the fundamentals of life like washing my hands and caring for neighbours, I think we can all say that it is a challenge. Today looking eerily like yesterday, which also looked like the day before.

In the meantime, crises in our families, neighbourhoods and around the world continue to arise. The demands can feel overwhelming at times. For a church that is physically closed, I am seeing some very busy, too busy, dedicated volunteer leaders. I've heard two such leaders in the past week acknowledge that doing God's work here is demanding, it almost feels like a job, but a job that they love. The line, though, is thin between the hard work of getting through these times (granted it might be work we love and for faith and for God) and feeling overwhelmed.

Healing and love and outreach and caregiving in our world that doesn't seem to sleep, it is draining. Mark is reminding us that even Jesus, the son of God, needed to get away from his saviour work to pray. So should we. It is important. It is faithful. It is loving our neighbor as ourselves – if we can't love ourselves, care for ourselves, how can we reach out to love others, to be healers, listeners?

What is your practice, your own way of getting away from the fray, like Jesus, and for caring for yourself? I'd like to close with a few seconds of silence for you to picture yourself doing what gives you joy, energy. What refills your spiritual bucket? Give that to God in prayer, thankfully, and make a date with yourself to do that sometime today, and tomorrow, and every day for the rest of your life.

God loves you, so love yourself, then love others. Amen.