Mark 1: 29-39

These first recorded hours of Jesus’ ministry are a whirlwind of activity. It started one afternoon, and continued the following morning. There was morning drama in the synagogue where he had expelled the unclean spirits of a man, to the astonishment of all in the service, and subsequently, his fame began to spread on what we would call nowadays, the bush telegraph.

But the restrictions of the Sabbath observance necessitated their having a quiet afternoon and work was forbidden, but Simon’s mother-in-law was ill, and Jesus always put compassion before the law and went to the home of Simon and Andrew. When they got there “Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever.” Not surprisingly, he healed her, and after the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

I suppose you could take that as evidence of a patriarchal culture where women were expected to serve the men. I prefer to take it as evidence that when Christ heals someone, the healing goes deeper than curing a superficial fever. Jesus was intent on bringing us around to the life we are intended to live, a life where the greatest are the servants of others.

Interestingly, if Simon had a mother-in-law, then he must have had a wife. Which, in turn, will prompt us to conclude that Simon was married.  Simon later became the Apostle Peter, and then became the first Bishop of Rome. In later years this position would become the “Pope”. It was not until the year 325 that the policy that Popes and bishops could not be married was brought in, and remains the policy of the Catholic Church to this day, further expanding the requirement of celibacy to all of its priests.

One of the fascinating things found in Mark is his portrayal of Jesus’ popularity. On this particular day Jesus had preached precisely one sermon, cast out one demon, and healed a mother-in-law. But the word got out and his fame quickly spread throughout the land. Perhaps too quickly for his own comfort.

Naturally, as the news rapidly spread the public reaction was inevitable, and that evening at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. It seemed that the whole of Capernaum was gathered around the door, bringing him absolutely everyone in town who was sick, or demon possessed, and naturally, every afflicted person among them wanted to be healed.

Because of scientific and medical advances today, we do not label mental illness as the work of a demonic force as the personification of evil.

When he’d finished that long evening’s work, Jesus went to bed. But he got up early to pray in peace and quiet, and so off he went, without telling anyone where he was going. It’s easy to understand that he had to get away for a break and restore some vestige of his own sanity and equilibrium.

But in the excitement Simon and his companions had further expectations of his talents. They seemed rather put out that Jesus had given them the slip, and when they found him, they told him that everyone was searching for him. All those people who came to their doorstep the night before, not surprisingly, were back.

One can imagine them bursting with excitement as the disciples led Jesus back to the public. Everyone anticipated that he would continue his healing, but Jesus had a different agenda: he wanted to go to different neighbouring towns to proclaim his message.

The demand on Jesus’ time and energy in this fast-paced Gospel is intense.
Although this is not a perfect analogy, the intensity of Jesus’ mission can mirror the hectic schedules of modern-day life. Nowadays many a priest leaves their phone on 24/7.” This means they are on call 24/7.

I don’t for one minute compare our busyness with Jesus’ ministry, but we can understand the pressure that comes from the constant demands of others. However, we do not feel the same urgency that the first listeners felt, because we live in a country of relative peace and security.

Furthermore, we are not occupied by a dominant power like the Romans, and also, these days people can be suspicious of travelling missionaries.

Going to one town and staying there was not his mission.  Traveling far and wide was his mission, teaching about the kingdom and then healing people as an example of the kingdom’s work. As in a good western saga, it was time to get out of Dodge.

As the gospel story progresses, Jesus was more than a healer, but he seemed unable to keep pace with the incredible demand that human needs placed upon him. So, he eventually commissioned others to assist in his work.

This brings up the importance for us of availability. As a faith community we are invited to be available to those who are in genuine need. At the same time, there is what we might call the ‘poverty of availability’.

We need to find a balance between people’s needs and our limited resources. We do not help people (and in fact ourselves) by working to the point of ‘burnout’. To renew our energy is important and Jesus gave us an excellent example here by going away to a deserted place to pray. Eventually, the partnership of Jesus and his disciples brought stability to his many followers and heralded the new concept of worship with Christianity.

The ministry of Jesus is the instrument of peace. This includes the peace of heart, peace of mind, and healing the mind and soul. Jesus cared for those who are least, last, and lost. Indeed, the heart of Jesus flowed to those who needed his salvation; He focused on meeting the people who are broken, tortured by daily grind, those who are the subject of cruelty, those who are left and forgotten.

His healing certainly gave people physical relief, but it was also a healing of doubt, anxiety, guilt, and all the burdens that can weigh us down.

His example of healing and enlightenment gives us a strengthening of ourselves, an inspirational lift for us all to conquer the challenges we face today. We resonate with the urgency of turmoil and suffering in the world, and we try to meet those demands unselfishly.

In our churches today we come together to pray, study, and enjoy fellowship while we listen to this message of Jesus. We hear the gospel proclaimed, and then God asks us to go out into the world to act on that word.

Amen