

Filling up and Spilling Over

Mark 1: 29-39

February 7, 2021

I don't know about you folks, but as we live in these pandemic days, I am still struggling to find balance in many areas of my life. Particularly around food, each day is a struggle to balance the chocolate food group against fruits and vegetables, exercise against sloth...and as a chocoholic extroverted sloth it is hard to find a balance of sweet and snuggly that doesn't cause weight gain in these days! Even finding my new discipleship balance has been interesting, as I have more time for prayer and study, but significantly less and different time for social engagement in visits or service. I am writing more cards, making phone calls and zooming, but still I have not reached my normal extroverted quota for personal contact. And as far as serving, I am grateful for opportunities that our food drives and serving at the NI Food bank provide, but there is more I would love to do when it is safe again. Like many of you, I grieve the loss of time in person together, and pray for healing and safety in our community and world again.

Our text for today gives us a window into a day in the life of Jesus, early in his ministry. Preach, teach, pray, lather, rinse. Repeat! It's exhausting – in just one day he's teaching, then casting out a demon, then he goes home to Simon's house to rest and ends up healing Simon's mother in law who then gives them dinner; but after dinner, the whole town comes over with folks to be healed by Jesus! No wonder Jesus goes out to pray with God after that – You can just imagine his prayer with God: is this how my contract is written?! Wait, what are my hours?! And how many times do I lather, rinse, repeat?

Jesus' ministry is exhaustive and exhausting...and we are asked to take up his mantle! Jesus asks us to follow him, to take his message to Jerusalem and beyond, to teach and preach and baptize, but he will be with us, thank God! Every time we feed, clothe and visit those in need, we are caring for him, he tells us. But, how do we do this? Our text for today gives us a clue: it is by following his whole schedule, which includes going off to pray and consult with God. Like Jesus, we can fill up with God on a regular basis, and especially when we are depleted, after we have poured ourselves out for others. But what can that look like in our lives? How do we achieve discipleship balance as we live our lives?

In her song “Filling up and spilling over,” singer Cris Williamson sang about balancing life in the endless cycle of filling up and spilling over: like a waterfall, like rain, water cycles through nature, and there is a balance that works out in that cycle.

Some of you may have seen the 1993 movie *Groundhog Day*, with Bill Murray and Andie Macdowell. We recently watched that again, and I was struck this time by what it took for Bill Murray to break out of reliving *Groundhog Day* over and over and over again. He goes to Punxatawney a selfish, self-centered cynic who is only concerned about advancing his own television weather reporting career. He doesn't even want to do the annual weather report on *Groundhog Day*, but he goes anyway, expecting to make it all about him. His staff are chopped liver, accessories, in his mind, and the townspeople are background noise. It takes him many repeats of the day to for him to begin to find some meaning for himself...at first he explores manipulating people to make himself happy; then, as he gets to know the people better, he begins to see opportunities for him to help them, and he begins to make some friends. Ultimately, in this process, he starts falling in love with his producer, Andie MacDowell, and he sets himself to learning how to make her happy, and begins building a relationship with her. Murray finally is allowed to move past *Groundhog Day*, when he has learned to love generously and sacrificially, with Andie and the people of Punxatawny: when he changes from filling only himself, to spilling over to bless others as well. He had to learn that his life is not just about him, but is really about how he can share himself in ways that help to build a positive, caring community.

In our text for today, and throughout the Gospels, Jesus shows us that in our living and giving, we are to develop and use our gifts to benefit our community – preaching and teaching (that is, showing God's love by our words and deeds) in our workplaces, and at home helping and healing our families and neighbors. Then we rest and refuel our hearts and souls in the love and wisdom of God as we commune with God in nature, in prayer, in silence and at worship.

It is in the wilderness, in our times of solitude indoors or outside, when we pray with God, we can get the bigger picture of our lives, the bigger purpose of our gifts, and the bigger plan for how we can bring blessing to the world. Jesus' time with God affirmed that his ministry was not just about healing everyone who asks,

but that he actually needed to teach and preach as well, and to do those things in many other towns as well. Jesus continually returns to God to refuel and reorient his ministry. We learn from this that God can help **us** keep balance, focus, and direction for our lives, too, when we seek God out at the beginning, end, and maybe even the middle of our days.

John Wesley, founder of our Methodist movement, worked with his co-hort of leaders in England to form small groups for prayer, service and study, to help his people keep their discipleship balanced and focused in their lives. Each week they would go to their work, but then they would also get together in these small groups to pray for each other, to study the Bible together, and to serve in the community together – for example they would visit the hospitals, or orphanages, or prisons to help people there. Then on Sundays they would worship at their local church. Wesley believed in balancing works of piety with works of service; similar to Jesus' call for us to love God and love our neighbor.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 17 this year. During Lent we are encouraged to draw closer to God and neighbor like Jesus. This is both an inward and outward journey. We cultivate our inward love for God and neighbor (acts of piety) through worship, sacraments, prayer, Bible Study. Our outward journey of loving God and neighbor happens as we serve others: by visiting shut-ins on the phone or by sending cards now, by cooking for Lazarus House or Hesed House, by running errands for someone homebound, by helping a child with homework, by sending care packages to teachers or nurses, by giving financial support to a friend or family in need. In all of these ways we can grow deeper in our relationships with God and neighbor, and in God's love. But Jesus reminds us to keep a balance. Fill up with God, so we can spill over with others. Spill over with others, and then refill with God. We cannot be healthy if we just fill up, and we will be empty if we only spill over.

What do you do to fill up with God? How do you spill over, serving others? How are you doing finding your discipleship balance in these pandemic times?

Bill Murray in his repeats of Groundhog Day learned to notice and get to know the people around him; he learned to listen to their cares, to care for their needs, and to contribute his skills and his heart to the community. He learned to do his work in collaboration with others, not competing with or criticizing others. He learned

to care for himself, so that he could care for others better. He found a balance between filling up and spilling over that allowed him to live and love generously.

Author Ralph Waldo Emerson defined a successful life this way: “To laugh often, to win the affection of children, to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends, to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others, and to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch...to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived, this is to have succeeded!” His words speak to me of how we find balance between personal and social, between preaching and serving, between nature and community; to live lives of generous love with God and neighbor.

In these pandemic times, when we are learning to live differently, let us learn to live better, following our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us teach and preach the love of God by our kind words and generous deeds: at home, at work, and at school. And, let us live the love of God by offering friends, neighbors and strangers words of healing, hands of healing, gifts of hope and help. And let us pray, study and consult with God daily, filling up with more love and hope and help to share, so that even one life will breathe easier because we have lived...so that our church and community and world can become places where God’s love, and love of neighbor are experienced by everyone, every day in many ways.

Let us serve and pray in Jesus’ footsteps, this day, and always, Amen!

Pastor Lisa Telomen

Benediction:

Before we close let me remind you that Ash Wednesday is coming soon, February 17! This year, because of the dangers of coronavirus transmission, we will not be imposing ashes; but rather we will invite you to anoint each other with olive oil at home during our Ash Wednesday worship service. While ashes remind us of our mortality, anointing with oil reminds us of our salvation, healing and everlasting life with Christ. Be sure to join us online for this meaningful worship, and have a bit of olive oil at hand.

The benediction for today is inspired by Amanda Gorman, our youth poet laureate, whose poetry calls us back to the heart of our faith.

I send us forth now to step out of the shade of our world, aflame with Christ's light, and unafraid, held in God's love. Let us free a new dawn through our faith and discipleship, bravely releasing our light and love to transform our world in the name of Jesus Christ. Let us go to love and to serve. Amen.