

“The Bad News Blues”

Isaiah 40:21-31
Mark 1:29-39

Feb. 2, 2009
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I have found my laptop to be one of the handiest things I own. It's amazing to think computers used to fill up whole buildings with their bulk and couldn't do a fraction of what my little laptop does. Mainly I just use it at my desk plugged into the wall socket, but sometimes I take it with me to a coffee shop or on a plane. It has a rechargeable battery in it. It will last me about 3 or 4 hours before it shuts down. It's not usually an issue because I plug it back in as soon as I can. Sometimes I can make the battery stretch a few days by only using it sparingly. Clearly, though, it was not made to work on its own without an outside power source.

Human beings are kind of like these laptops. We can go on our own for a little while, but without being hooked to a true power source, we begin to shut down. We burn out. Or we try to carefully conserve what little energy we have by doing very little outside of what we have to do to survive. Most of us save our energy for work because without work we can't pay bills.

In our passage today, Jesus seems to be aware of this issue of energy. He spends all day healing people and casting out demons and he is spent. The next morning, though, rather than sleeping as much as he can before going right back at it; he goes off by himself to pray. It's easy to think of Jesus as one with limitless power, but we must remember that he is a human being, physically and emotionally limited as human beings are. He goes to hook his soul back up to the power source, his Father in heaven.

If Jesus needed this alone time with God, how much more might we need it? And nobody is going to give you that time. Not work. Not your family. Not even your church. The world will run you ragged with no apologies. Just look at the disciples and Jesus. The text says that his companions hunted for him. Hunted is such an extreme word, but it is so true. It is hard to find time alone. Whether it is by phone, email, text message, or doorbell, the world hunts us down.

I suppose that is why Jesus got up so early. He knew they'd be coming. But that alone time with God is so important, so vital to our relationship with God, and the world. Everything starts with our relationship with God. God is the power source. Without regularly plugging in, our batteries run down quickly. But it is also important for our relationship with everyone else. We are no good to others if we are not good with God.

It's like when the flight attendant says before a take-off that if the oxygen masked drops down due to a sudden drop in cabin pressure that you are to place the mask on your own face first and then help children and others who are not able to do it first. When we neglect our relationship with God, it diminishes our ability to care for others.

Also, we need time away from others. Some times we need to disconnect from

others, even the ones we love in order to know best how to love them. When we are always with people we can easily lose perspective on our role as a disciple of Christ. We can get so enmeshed with the needs of others that we can lose sight of our true purpose. We need a retreat. We need to be led by still waters.

Jesus surely felt somewhat overwhelmed with the needs of the masses of people that were coming to him for healing. One wonders if he would have still been at Peter's mother in law's house today with a line of sick and possessed seeking his healing power. But his purpose was not to be the local healer. Taking time away from the needs of others allowed him to refocus on his true mission: proclaiming the good news that the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news. Certainly, healing was a work of Good News, but not the good news itself.

The disciples didn't have a clear picture yet of what he was doing. They were ready for a repeat performance, but Jesus says that they must move on to the next town to preach the message because that is his purpose.

Taking time in prayer helps us to get a clearer vision of our mission. If we simply allow the needs of others to lead us then we lose our way as disciples, but also will be overwhelmed and eaten up by a world of endless misery and need. Ultimately, it will kill our souls.

The 24/7 news channels can raise anxiety and depression levels quicker than anything I can think of. They are nonstop bad news. We have enough bad news right here in this community without hearing about it in every corner of the world at a microscopic level. Have you ever watched an hour of Fox or CNN and just felt great about life?

How do you think Jesus and the disciples would feel if they had a non-stop line of bad news at the door? It would give anyone a case of the bad news blues.

Good news is the cure for the bad news blues that has enveloped the world since Adam and Eve ate the apple. Good news is the mission of this church. If all Project JOY (our mission to Appalachia) was only about giving folks some food and clothes, then it is only a drop in the lake of need in Harlan, KY. But if we bring the Good News then Harlan can be transformed. Good news is infectious. It is like a weed. Once it takes root, it will be springing up for years. It can break through the hardest and heaviest problems like weeds popping up through cement. It can't be stopped once it is started.

This ministry that PLPC inaugurates today, Martha's Kitchen, is not just about feeding hungry stomachs. If it is, it will die out soon. It must be about spreading Good News. The Kingdom of God has drawn near, turn away from the bad news world and believe in the Good News world of God.

The purpose of this Church is not to meet all the needs of all the needy people in our community; it is to spread Good News. Once it takes root, lives will be transformed.

We can't just treat the symptoms; we have to provide the cure. And in order to stay focused on our true mission and sustain such a mission over time we must spend time alone with God in prayer. We must pray as a community, yes, but each of us must spend time alone with God in prayer. Allow God to recharge your batteries and refocus you on your true mission as a disciple of Christ. Like Isaiah tells us "God gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak." Are you feeling weary? Seek God and he will give you strength and power. "Even youth grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall, but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength." Put your hope in the Lord, not earthly solutions. And he says, "They will soar (those who hope) on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

If we do not seek God in prayer, we will cease to be part of the solution and we will become part of the problem in this world. We will become just another bad news story. Another failed church giving people another reason to just stay at home, dying of the bad news blues.

Instead, let us commit today to take time to pray. Before you pour your first cup of coffee. Before you turn on CNN or FOX or whatever bad news source you look at. Before you log into your email with a dozen things to which respond. Hook yourself up to the source of power and guidance: your God. If only for 10 minutes. Don't start your day with a dead battery. And remember that you have the cure for the bad news blues down in your heart. Do you remember that old good news song? I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart!