

Mark 1:29-39
2/4/18—5th Sunday after the Epiphany B

Psalms 147:1-11, 20c
Isaiah 40:21-31

After Worship

What are you doing after worship?

Oh my gosh, you may be thinking. *Did the pastor just get back from another planet? How could she ask such a silly question?* Did she forget that at twelve-thirty today, we're meeting with our district superintendent for a special Charge Conference?

And that's not all. It's Super Sunday! Millions of Americans will be at Super Bowl gatherings today. Now I know the kickoff is still several hours away—and that's a good thing, or some might be out the door already. But whether you're pulling for the Eagles or for the Patriots, or you just like to watch the commercials, or you don't even turn on the game, you're probably looking forward to some relaxation this afternoon and evening.

And that's entirely fitting! You are made in the image of God who rested after the work of creation. On a day the Scriptures call *sabbath*. Followers of Jesus celebrate sabbath on the Lord's Day, the day of resurrection. On Sunday. On Sunday, we worship. It's wonderful to gather with your family of faith to worship God.

But some Christians have a curious notion about worship. Some Christians have gotten the idea that once they've been to

worship, they're done. That once they've sat in a pew for an hour on Sunday, that's everything they need to do. Everything they're *supposed* to do as disciples of Jesus. That he's not asking them to do anything else the other six days of the week.

Hmmm. What do you think about that?

During this time together, let's consider what we are to do after worship. Because we follow Jesus. We pattern our lives after his. And in the gospels, we see a picture of the life and ministry of Jesus. A picture that has implications for us.

Last week, in Mark's Gospel, we saw Jesus at worship. In last Sunday's reading, he was at First Synagogue Capernaum. This Sunday's reading picks up where last week's left off. On the same sabbath day. In today's reading, Mark tells us what Jesus does after worship.

Right after leaving the synagogue, Jesus and his newly-called disciples head over to Simon's and his brother Andrew's house. It's a large home, really more of a compound. In this extended-family dwelling, Simon's wife's mother is the senior woman of the household. The one who presides over the kitchen and the preparation of meals.

But she's sick. Running a fever. It's a serious illness. One that could prove to be fatal. As soon as Jesus hears about it, he goes straight to her. Takes her hand. Heals her. And raises her up from her sickbed. The illness is gone. It's like she never had it! She's able to resume her honored position in the household. She's able to do what gives her joy. She's able to serve her family and her guests.

Jesus and his disciples enjoy a sabbath dinner together. And we as United Methodists can certainly identify with that!

But Mark tells us that *after worship, Jesus does the miraculous work of healing. And he calls you and me to do the same.* His purpose is always for healing.

Now not many of us have medical training. Not many of us are physicians or nurses. But healing comes in a number of other ways—and they too are miraculous!

Healing comes for bodies and minds and spirits. Healing comes in a kind word. Healing comes in a card or a note. Healing comes in a visit. Healing comes in a hug. Healing comes in laughter, which can be very good medicine indeed. Healing comes when with deep compassion we reach out and, because we do, a person who was suffering is no longer isolated and is restored to

the fellowship and the service of the community. Just as Simon's mother-in-law is on this sabbath day.

But eventually, the sun sets, the sabbath is over, and the throngs of people who've heard about Jesus can now bring their loved ones to him. The crowd forms around Simon's door. And Jesus works all evening long, healing sick people. And casting out demons.

Casting out demons? Uh-oh—I can hear your wheels start turning. *Aren't evil spirits kind of a relic from an ancient time? Don't we twenty-first century people have a more sophisticated worldview? Do demons and demon-possession really have anything to do with our lives today?*

Well. Of course you make that determination for yourself. But I'll tell you what *I* think.

The powers of evil do inhabit today's world. They're real. When they're able to hold a person in their grip, you might see the results on the evening news.

But Jesus Christ, who heralds a radically different kind of world—a new creation—overcomes evil forces. *After worship, Jesus casts out demons. And he calls you and me to do the same.*

But just how do we do that? The Bible offers counsel. Some *can come out only through prayer*, according to Jesus. If we see someone afflicted with evil, he asks us to pray for that person. And Paul urges: *If they're hungry, feed them. If they're thirsty, give them something to drink...overcome evil with good.*

And that's exactly what we see Jesus doing in Capernaum, well into the night. But in the morning—before dawn, before anyone else is up—Jesus goes off to a solitary place. To pray. Fully human, he knows that being able to do what he has come to do depends on receiving strength from the Source of all power. Jesus acknowledges his need to be in intimate relationship with his Father. *After worship, Jesus prays in private. And he calls you and me to do the same.*

In worship, you and I pray together as a community of faith. We invoke. We praise. We intercede. We confess. We give thanks. That's what we do as God's gathered people.

Yet nothing delights the heart of God more than to have you seek solitude and then to hear from you—just *you*—God's own beloved child. To know that you are both speaking and, in stillness, listening.

And if Jesus himself needs the power and the peace that come from loving relationship with the One who sent him, how much more do you and I need these gifts? We stand in need of them in order to be able to do what Jesus does when he's found by Simon and the others. Jesus says: *Let's get going. Let's go to all the villages around here so I can keep on doing what I came to do. So I can proclaim the message.*

After worship, Jesus announces his message: the good news of God's kingdom. And he calls you and me to do the same. We have a story to tell, a story with power to transform the life of everyone who hears it. We have good news to share: the great good news of a kingdom that has already drawn near but is not yet accomplished in its fullness.

Thy kingdom come, we ask, whenever in our worship we offer the prayer that Jesus taught. But our Lord wants us to understand that speaking those words in this house of prayer is not all he calls us to do.

For it's in our deeds of caring that the kingdom comes. It's in our acts of mercy that the kingdom comes. It's in witnessing to our faith that the kingdom comes. It's in our seeking justice and deliverance for the powerless that the kingdom comes. It's through

the loving service of every last one of us that God's will is done and that this blessed kingdom comes.

Beloved, worship is not the end of what we do for and with Christ Jesus. It's just the beginning. What we do *after* worship truly matters. For Jesus has promised that as a believer, you will do the works that he does and will, in fact, do [even] greater works than these.

Worship prepares you to do these works. Worship equips you to do these works. And worship sustains you to do these works. In this house of worship, in this hour of worship, you are invited to the table of grace.

There, you meet the One who by the Spirit's power is present. Mysteriously present. Yet *really* present.

There, you're nourished. There, you're made ready for the holy privilege, the high adventure, the overflowing joy of journeying and serving with Jesus Christ.

So come. Be filled with him. Be strengthened by him who empowers you, when you go forth after worship, to run and not be weary. To walk and not faint!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.