

Maybe you remember the 1992 ad campaign by the world's most famous basketball player at the time, marketing a sports drink.

I suspect the iconic three-word campaign still sounds familiar:

“Be Like Mike.”

The catchy tune and winsome Michael Jordan made the commercial a cultural event.

While the ad showed Jordan in all his glory and urged everyone to be and achieve greatness like he did,

mostly, I suspect, Gatorade wanted you to “be like Mike”
and buy a lot of Gatorade.

This idea of imitating heroes was not invented by Gatorade, of course. From a Christian perspective, the idea was promoted by the classic work by Thomas A’ Kempis in the 15th c. entitled *The Imitation of Christ*. And, of course, he got that idea from scripture itself which says that we are to be like Christ.

Paul tells the Corinthian church to imitate himself
as he imitates Christ.

How have you thought about the imitation of Christ?
In what ways do you seek to imitate Christ?

Our text in Mark this morning has lots of advice
about what it might mean to “be like Christ.”

As you remember, we are in the seasons of Epiphany, where we are “being shown” the person and work of Jesus.

Last week we saw a Jesus who the authoritative TEACHER
and one who brings God’s POWER.

This week, we see Jesus healing individuals,
healing communities, more power over demons,
and, we see Jesus taking time out to reconnect.

As is Mark’s custom, our text here once again tells a caffeinated story, a rapid-fire listing of all the things Jesus has been doing. Mark takes no time to explain anything.

On the plus side, it keeps us preachers in business, but in the five episodes in ten short verses this morning, one could preach five sermons, and, of course, no one wants that!

But listen to how breathlessly Mark describes Jesus’s activity:

- Jesus skedaddles from his teaching and healing in the synagogue to Simon and Andrew’s house and heals Simon’s mother-in-law.
- That night at sunset, he cures many who were sick and casts out many demons.

- Jesus is either a morning person, or sets his alarm, and gets up early to sneak off by himself to pray.
- Then a crowd shows up for more healing and exorcisms, but Jesus high-tails it to some town nearby to proclaim the message of transformation and hope and kick out some more demons. Whew!

But two parts of this story bear closer investigation.

First, the healing of Peter's sick mother-in-law. We've seen lots of healing of the sick already. What stands out about Peter's mother-in-law?

This: Once Peter's mother-in-law is healed, she *serves* them.

This might strike us as just the usual responsibility of a woman in the home then, and perhaps now. That's nice, she got everyone tea and cookies.

However, the word for service is more substantive than that.

It's the Greek word *diakonia*. It's the word used previously in Mark to describe the angels that "attend to and care for" Jesus after the temptation in the wilderness.

And you might recognize this Greek word *diakonia* as the source of the word "Deacon," a position in the early church through to today, that emphasizes service to others.

Lawrence Wood puts it this way:

"Everyone knows Simon Peter's name. No one knows hers, even though what happened to her had a profound effect on Simon." She was at the forefront of the entire Christian movement that has an impact all the way down to us today.

"The Christian church" says Wood,
"was born with Simon's mother-in-law."
That's not tea and cookies!

Indeed Jesus lifts up the sick woman to health and service.

As *we* are healed, restored, raised up,
we too are called to serve.

Having raised up Simon Peter's mother-in-law, Jesus then proceeds to further heal and cast out demons into the night.

We've already seen Jesus performing these miraculous deeds, so these are not new. Jesus healed persons, like Simon's mother-in-law, and heals whole communities:

many who came were healed, and *many* were cleansed of unclean spirits.

As an aside, why were only "many" healed and "many" cleansed of demons, and not "ALL"? One assumes it wasn't because Jesus encountered illnesses that were just too challenging to heal, or demons that were just too stubborn to be kicked out.

Elsewhere in the gospels, we see Jesus commending a person's faith in believing that Jesus could heal them. Does that mean that some without faith would not be healed? And wouldn't that be problematic, that Jesus's hands are tied to heal someone if they don't have enough faith? Maybe it's much more practical . . .

Maybe there just isn't enough time. Jesus, at some point, goes to bed.
He stops healing and casting out.
And he sleeps.

And here is part two . . .

And then, see what he does the next day. In the morning,
while it was still very dark,
he got up and went out to a deserted place,
and there he prayed.

Frequently in the gospels, we see Jesus heading out to a quiet space to pray.

It's easy to give our attention to the miracles and healing that Jesus does.
But, but we can learn from his rest too.
Even the Son of God takes time off—it's okay to take a break!

In the book *Building a Discipling Culture*, Mike Breen and Steve Cochram, invite us to see our Christian work as a *pendulum*.

On one side is fruitfulness, and on the other is rest.

We must swing from rest to fruitfulness and back again.

We cannot have one without the other.

We rest in Christ, then swing with him into our mission.

When we exhaust our missional energy,

We need to swing back to recharge.

Burnout happens when we throw ourselves into our work,
attempting to bear fruit with no rest.
Jesus teaches by example that we must take prayerful retreat
in order to bear fruit.¹

The church historically has focused more on “doing” for Christ, than “being” in God. and for good reason: it's hard to do! In our contemporary culture with a myriad of distractions, such as smartphones, television, media, 24-7 news shows, streaming services, just to name a few.

Jesus only had interaction with people, but he knew he had to carve out some solitary time to reconnect with the Father.

Recently, my partner Anna and I have been thinking about the demands on our lives, and, specifically, how tied we are to our smartphones. Of course, there are necessary communication to be had—family and work calls and texts.

But it's easy to waste a lot of time on social media, and following hyperlinks to more and more seemingly worthwhile content, but are they really worthwhile?

Is that what we want to do with our time? What do we have to show for having consumed friends' social media updates or scrolling through the New York Times?

We even looked into old flip phones, or “dumbphones.”

¹Sundays and Seasons, ELCA.

Remember them? You could only make and receive phone calls. That's it. We even called the ATT store in Burnsville, who, quite surprisingly to me, had just sold their last flip phone and were out of stock.

Are more people trying to reduce the wasteful distractions in their lives? One would hope. Jesus certainly reduced distractions by finding a solitary, deserted place where he could connect with the Father. Something worthy of imitation.

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So in order to help us practice with Jesus preaches, I'm giving you some homework. Or rather, I'm just passing along a biblical idea. *Be Like Christ*. Given what we've seen in our text today,

First, seek to be a healing presence to someone who is hurting or troubled, or struggling or in need. Care, and connect. Maybe we can't perform miraculous healings or exorcisms, but we can, in the words of Gary Charles, work to fight against the "demonic in people, and in systems that diminish or distort that gracious reign of God."

Second, find a "deserted place,"
a place of solitude,
away from distractions and demands and busyness—
maybe somewhere in nature,
maybe somewhere in your home,
maybe turn off your smartphone,
and pray.

Pray for the sick and the possessed, whatever that possession might be, whatever it is that may be keeping someone from God.

In the words of our Prayers of Intercession, pray for

"God's blessing on the church, the world, and all of creation."

Find rest, rest in God, so you can
swing into the healing and restoring work of the reign of God.

For this is what you have been raised up to do.

Thanks be to God, Amen.