

Making Space for God

Lessons from Mark-#1-Beginnings

Opening Prayer

Lord, teach me to listen. The times are noisy and my ears are weary with the thousand raucous sounds which continuously assault them. Give me the spirit of the boy Samuel when he said to Thee, "Speak, for thy servant heareth." Let me hear Thee speaking in my heart. Let me get used to the sound of Thy Voice, that its tones may be familiar when the sounds of earth die away and the only sound will be the music of Thy speaking Voice. Amen.

From the Pursuit of God by A. W. Tozar



Arrival

Take five minutes to settle yourself by breathing deeply. Inhale for the count of five through your nose and as you do so pray silently, "I belong to Jesus." Exhale through your mouth for the count of ten and as you do so pray silently "Body and Soul, in this life and the next." Once you feel relaxed invite the Lord to guide and direct your thoughts for the day. Think back over where you have been in the last eight weeks. What burdens, emotions, and concerns do you carry? What are you thankful for? Offer these to the Lord.

Scripture—Mark 1:9-13

Read the passage slowly a couple of times to let it sink in.

Reflect and Do

It was a portentous beginning for Jesus at the Jordan. The sacred river that once parted for Joshua anointed his namesake in baptism. The first Joshua was looking for a safe passageway to the promise land for his people. The stream was stopped to expose a muddy path. Danger and death were held at bay while the tribes marched by.

Jesus emerged from the waters to see the gates of heaven torn open. He heard a Voice proclaim love, kinship, and affirmation. That Voice would sustain him as he sought to conquer the death and danger that threatened to drown our sad world in sorrow. The Prince of Peace who was commissioned for service by Noah's dove was driven to war with the devil by that same bird. And in that wild and lonely place, angels ministered to him as they will to us as we make space to receive them.

I am intrigued with how aware Jesus was of the invisible spiritual realities—sacred rituals that anchored him in history, the Father's voice, a dove like anointing, and angels and devils in the wilderness. In our fast paced superficial world, we rarely take the time to listen, to notice, and to pray. We routinely fall prey to distraction while we miss the words of encouragement that might come to us through Scripture, friends, or our dreams.

As you begin a new school year, remember that you too have been commissioned to lead a community of students to the promise land. The invisible Voice that calls you His child longs for you to know how much you are loved. It's the Father's love that will energize your life and keep you from the temptations of fame, fear, and shortcuts. What will do on a daily basis to remain in earshot of His voice of love?

Secondly, you work in a fast paced, collegiate environment that has its unique set of soul dangers. Superficiality, distraction, loneliness, and too much to do can drown the most buoyant of persons. What will help you stay afloat this year? Make and begin your plan now, not after student outreach.

Finally, list your hopes and fears for the year ahead. Share those thoughts with Jesus and with a friend or accountability partner. Then be on the lookout for God's ministering angels. They wear many guises.¹

Readings

Success is a very dubious enterprise. In a way, the children of God are always meant to be in the opposition. They're outsiders. When they become successful, that's when the problems begin...I think Moses can be described as clinically depressed at the end. I've done all this, God and you do this to me! There's a sense of not being rewarded. And yet, you bargain for that. You don't know God's will. You really don't. If there is any lesson to be learned, it is a certain modesty in the face of great opportunity. The biblical mandate is not success, it's humility. You're not God. You're not supposed to be fat and happy... But that is not the lesson most Americans take from the Bible. No, they take American exceptionalism. But it seems to me that an exceptional people has to be willing to subordinate their own ambitions to God's ultimate design. And no one ever accused Americans of doing that. What we have done is take God's design and make it conform to our ambition.

Bruce Feilder in America's Prophet- How the Story of Moses Shaped America, page 32

"Many of us associate God with cranky nuns with hands on hips or stern preachers with pursed lips nearly bursting with fury because we were chewing gum in church. We see God as a stern and controlling parent who was watching with simmering rage from the window when we were experiencing the thrill of our first kiss in a car in the driveway. Or we see God as a terrifying judge who has been counting our life's infractions and will inevitably charge us, mercilessly judge us, and eternally punish us for our guilt. But the scandalous truth, known by mystics throughout history and affirmed in the pages of our sacred texts, is that when we connect with God, it is as if we are plugging our souls into a pure current of high-voltage joy....When we tap into the pure joy that burns like a billion galaxies in the heart of God, we'll soon find ourselves shouting, dancing, singing, leaping, clapping, swaying, laughing, and otherwise jubilating and celebrating."

Brian McLaren – Naked Spirituality

Benediction

Christ is Risen: The world below lies desolate
Christ is Risen: The spirits of evil are fallen
Christ is Risen: The angels of God are rejoicing
Christ is Risen: The tombs of the dead are empty

Christ is Risen indeed from the dead,
the first of the sleepers,
Glory and power are his forever and ever
St. Hippolytus of Rome (AD 190-236)