

The Rhythm of Life

Isaiah 40:21-31

Mark 1:29-39

This week's online discussion came complete with a YouTube link to a music video called the Rhythm of Life. Being curious I clicked on this link and encountered a very addictive song. It's originally from Sweet Charity. Perhaps you are familiar with it. It struck me as resonating very well with this week's lesson from the Gospel According to Mark. But if you've ever been on YouTube then you know that while the clip you've linked to is playing, there is an entire list of alternative clips listed down the right side of the computer screen. Since most of the clips featured photos of choirs and groups, I was intrigued by one that featured only one black man, so after listening to the other clip, I had to click on that one. It wasn't the same song, but in ten seconds I was transported to the Dominican Republic, to sitting poolside while the more active people at our resort went through the exercises of water aerobics.

In daylight and fully awake, I discovered the reason for the difference. From Sweet Charity the piece is called The Rhythm of Life. From Lil Wayne, who is the person featured in the second video, the piece is actually called The Rhythm of My Life. But both struck me as being acutely relevant to the life of Jesus as we encounter it this week.

This week we are confronted by the reality that Jesus goes off to be alone. We are also confronted by the fact that when the disciples try to bring him back to where the crowds are waiting for him, Jesus instead turns away from where he has been and moves forward to a new destination. He refuses to be drawn back to those who seek to

impose their expectations on him, and instead moves toward a new location which will enable him to fulfil the ministry to which he believes he is called. He is also insistent on being faithful to the rhythm of his life – time to minister, time apart, and then time to move on.

It makes it quite a challenge for us to think not only about how we are called to ministry, and how we need to be clear about the nature of our call, but also upon the rhythm that we apply or allow to be imposed on our lives, and our faithfulness. Do we allow ourselves to be sidetracked by the perception of what others deem to be important? Do we allow ourselves to have time alone with God, time to recharge and renew ourselves? Do we take the time to see if we are still on course and in harmony with our calling?

The evangelist, Mark, sees that Jesus needs time apart, time to reflect and time to communicate with God, which the disciples clearly do not understand. They are concerned with popularity and the needs of crowds, but then, it is not only early in their discipleship, but also this is the Gospel which uses them to illustrate that sense and understanding only come after the crucifixion and resurrection, so we can forgive them.

But the most challenging remarks online weren't about the passage from Mark, but about the passage from Isaiah. One member commented about the need to spend time on our knees, and how Jesus recognises that, and also how the passage from Isaiah supports that. But that remark was challenged by another who said that when we say that to people in need, we are offering them a meaningless platitude. Spending time on our knees, or in another attitude of prayer, or in meditation or contemplation does not solve all

of our problems, and does not stop reality from intruding. Even those who spend a great deal of time on their knees still find the hard realities of this life creeping in, whether it is the diagnosis of cancer or the return of cancer, a child in prison, a parent or partner struggling with Alzheimer's, job loss as a company down-sizes, the death of someone who is significant in our lives; we need to recognise that prayer doesn't take those realities away and we need to be honest with people about that.

Jesus spent a day healing people, but there are always more waiting for his touch. Going away to renew his strength through quiet time, does not change that reality. Isaiah summons us to trust in God for help, or in a more familiar translation for many of us, to wait in the Lord.

The word "wait" is important, particularly in a society that is not very good at waiting. So often we think of waiting as a sitting around, doing nothing, twiddling our thumbs kind of thing, though today there is likely to be some electronic device between those thumbs! But there are so many more different kinds of waiting. There is prayer-full waiting, and waiting with patience. There is silent waiting, and waiting with song. There is centred waiting, and waiting in a world full of distractions. There is persistent waiting, and waiting with a foot tapping impatiently. There is hands-open waiting, and waiting with an open book. There is eyes-open waiting as the sun begins to rise, and waiting in daydreams. There is sitting-still-as-a-cat waiting, and waiting with one's tail about to wag off. We are simply told, over and over, to wait for the Lord, and all waiting, every kind of waiting, is appropriate. Often, the nature of the waiting is a reflection of the

rhythm of our lives.

For though we are told that those who wait for the Lord will find their strength renewed; we will rise on wings like eagles; we will run and not get weary; we will walk and not grow weak; it won't all happen all of the time. It will happen in God's time, not ours. It will happen in God's way, not ours. Both of these truths challenge us, since so often we want prayer to be an opportunity for us to give God a laundry list of our expectations, with the answers defined in our time and on our terms. It doesn't happen that way, and it isn't what God promises.

So the words of Isaiah hold hope for us and great promise. They offer us courage and strength. Indeed, as we continue to seek to discern God's will and plan for this congregation, they seem to be particularly apt. The answers won't come quickly or easily. They won't prevent us from the hard task of assessing, and evaluating, or of dealing with the realities of being the church in the twenty-first century, but they will remind us that God is the source of our strength, and that the answers *will* come. I love these words from Isaiah, and have them in a framed piece of stitchery above my computer in my office. They offer comfort but they also offer challenge. For they do not offer us easy answers, and they never will. They remind us that we will face all of the realities of living in this world. We will exult in its joy and we will plumb its depths, but if we continue to place our trust in God, if we will wait for God's answers in God's time, we will be renewed and we will be strengthened to continue to serve in God's way. This is the way that we will find and embrace the true rhythm of our lives. Thanks be to God. Amen.

