

Scripture: Mark 1:29-39

Sermon Title: "Take Five"

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Growing up on the farm, one of the chores that we had to do every morning and every evening, was to feed and water the young calves, the young heifers and bulls that we were raising up in the barns to eventually join the herd. And, the barns where we housed these young cattle, they did not have running water. So we would have a five gallon bucket that we needed carry to each animal, filled with water, twice a day. Now what happens when you pick up in one hand a full, five gallon bucket? It pulls you to one side, it throws off your balance. And I found as a kid, that as you tried to walk straight with this bucket it had the potential to actually steer you in one direction. Now, to help counteract this effect, I learned from an early age that if you stick out your other arm it helps restore some of the balance. But I think my dad had the best solution – he would just put another bucket in your other hand and send you on your way, balanced and able to walk straight to your destination.

Today, I want to reflect on balance and talk about balance beyond the physical. Balance is something that we long to find in many aspects of our lives. So what does it look like in your life? When you think of all the things that you have to do, or want to do, the things you love to do, or hate to do but know you need to do – when you think of all this, how have you found a balance? How have you found a way of holding everything in your life that keeps you on that straight path, that centered path, that God path. Maybe, like many of us from time to time, you are still searching for a balance in your life and way to manage and hold all these things? Finding a balanced life is not always easy and whenever something changes in our lives, an event or a circumstance, we often lose that balance. When we encounter such changes it is like something has been thrown out of whack and we begin to be pulled off of our path to a centered life, we must then shift and essentially rearrange our lives to find our equilibrium again. This

can be hard work and it can take much time to find the right balance for each of us, but when we do and we find ourselves moving on that centered path, we find the life that I believe God longs for us all to lead.

In our reading today from the Gospel of Mark, we witness Jesus seeking to find a balance in his life with this new ministry of his that has just begun. I mean, here we are, still in Chapter one of Mark and this ministry is taking off. Today we hear about the following that Jesus is accumulating, for we witness in the reading a whole city coming to see Jesus, seeking healing and wholeness – and I would even suggest seeking an opportunity to be part of what God was doing through the life of Jesus, even if they didn't know exactly what that was just yet – but they came to be a part of something greater than themselves.

Now, when we look at this ministry that has begun, we can easily see a momentum growing. Jesus called his first disciples, he started teaching and word was spreading about him, and now people are actively searching for him to come and experienced him. And at this point, it would be easy for Jesus to get lost in his ministry – in his work. To throw himself only into what this ministry needed to grow. To spend every minute of every day focused on the work at hand and forsake himself and the care of self for the prospering of this ministry. To pile more and more into one hand and start pulling him away from that centered path on which God has called him. But instead, Jesus seeks a balanced life, which for him is founded in taking five – taking a break from this ministry and the momentum that we read of and he stops because there is something missing that he needs to balance his life. For the next morning, in the darkness, in the stillness of the early hours, he went to a deserted place and prayed. He literally stepped away from his ministry, from his work – a work that is grounded in other people's hearts, to care for himself, to care for his spirit as he does the work of caring for all the hearts that seek him. And in this time of quiet and solace, he prays and connects with God, connects with the Divine – just him and God – a moment to care for

his own heart. And from that point of caring for himself and nurturing his relationship with God, he balanced his life as this ministry is beginning, and he was able and ready to go and care for others. He balanced his life of care for others and care for self, which leads him on that centered path, that path ordained by God.

Beloved People of God, in a world that at times can feel chaotic with a pace of life that can overwhelm us, with expectations that are sometimes unattainable, and in lives and work that demand much from us, it's important that we follow the example of Jesus and take five, take a break, take a breather, and ensure that we have balanced our lives. To have those moments when we step away from the work that we are called to do and we answer the call to care for ourselves. It's important that we take those moments to ensure that our lives are balanced with self-care and love of self. And to be reminded, that to take time for us, to take time for what our hearts need, it is not greedy or selfish. It's what we need to live a balanced life. It keeps us on that God path. It's what we need so that we can be our best selves for others. And in those breaks, in those moments for self, in those times of balance, may they connect us with God in a way that renews our strength and strengthens our faith so that we are ready to then pick back up the work that has been placed before us and continue on God's righteous path.

The call for us today is this: seek your balance, so that your path may be straight and your life centered. For on such a path, God is glorified and we thrive. Amen.