

WHEN YOU CAN'T DO EVERYTHING

Scriptures: Mark 1:32-39; Mark 3:7-15

In May I shared a story from Erma Bombeck's book *Motherhood: the Second Oldest Profession*. Today I want to read from one of her other great theological treatises. This one is called, *The Grass Is Always Greener over the Septic Tank*. She describes a super mom named Estelle:

The moving van hadn't been gone a minute when we saw her in the yard waxing her garden hose. I walked over with my nine-bean "trash" salad and knocked on the door. ... I couldn't believe the inside of her house. The furniture was shining and in place, the mirrors and pictures were hung, there was not a cardboard box in sight, the books were on the shelves, there were fresh flowers on the kitchen table, and she had an iron tablet in her hand ready to pop into her mouth. ... "Could I get you something?" she asked softly. "I just baked a chiffon cake." ...

There was just no getting ahead of her. If the Blessed Mother had called Estelle and said, "Guess what, Estelle, I'm expecting a savior," Estelle would have said, "Me too." She cut the grass, baked her own bread, shoveled the driveway, grew her own herbs, made the children's clothes, altered her husband's suits, played the organ at church, planned the vacation, paid the bills, was on three telephone committees, five car pools, two boards, took her garden hose in during the winter, took her ironing board down every week, stocked the freezer with sides of beef, made her own Christmas cards, ... (and) assisted in the delivery of her dog's puppies (pp. 137-138).

Even Jesus could not keep up with that, which is exactly the point of today's scripture readings. On the insert in the bulletin I have listed three parallel accounts of the story I just read from Mark, chapter 1. Sometimes when you compare the same Bible story told in different gospels, you notice details that differ from one gospel to the other. These differences of detail can sometimes give you a new angle of insight into to what the story means. That is why we have four gospels in the Bible instead of just one.

Look at the first column from Matthew 8:16-17. It says, "That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick." Many people were brought to Jesus, and he healed them all. Now look at the second column from Mark, chapter 1: "That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons."

You see the difference. Matthew emphasizes that *many* were brought to Jesus and *all* were healed. Mark says that *all* were brought to Jesus and *many* were healed. Both gospels make an important point. Matthew, along with the gospel of Luke in the third column, emphasizes that Jesus can heal everyone. All were healed. Matthew and Luke want to be sure we understand that. There is no disease, no demon, no hurt in your life that Jesus cannot heal if you bring it to him.

Mark agrees with that. There is no one in Mark's gospel whom Jesus cannot heal. But Mark uses this same story to make a little different point. Not even Jesus can do everything all at once. This is proven by what happens next. Mark 1:35-37: "In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, 'Every one is searching for you.'" From these verses we learn three things:

1. Jesus did not heal everyone, because they are still looking for him the next day.
2. Even though he wasn't finished, Jesus went to bed.
3. When Jesus got up, he went off by himself to pray before he faced anymore needy people.

Jesus was the savior of the world, but he was not Erma Bombeck's supermom. As a human being he had limitations, just like the rest of us.

Now it is interesting to notice how Jesus coped with these limitations. First he stopped and prayed. When running out of time, he took even more time to go away off by himself and pray.

I must confess that is so unlike me. When I am stressed with too many things to do, my natural response is to work harder. I get up earlier, I try to work faster, I try multitask, like checking my email while I am talking to someone on the phone. And one of the first things I give up is taking time to pray. This is a terrible thing to admit, but it is true.

A couple years ago we had a retreat for pastors in our presbytery where the speaker was Richard Swenson, the doctor who wrote the book *Margins*. He made a lot of good points, but one especially stuck in my mind. He said that people who work too hard have quit believing in God. He said this to a group of pastors. We all got deathly quiet. He said that people who work too hard no longer believe that God is really sovereign. They no longer trust that God can really take care of this world, with or without our help.

When Jesus had too much to do, the first thing he did was pray. The first thing he did was to remember that God is still in charge.

The second thing he did was to review his personal mission statement. After taking time to pray Jesus says to Peter, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." Jesus was what we today might call an evangelist. His mission was to go from place to place proclaiming God's message and calling people to faith. To fulfill that mission he could not remain too long in any one town.

I have a different personal mission. I am not called to be an evangelist; I am called to be a pastor. My job requires staying in one place for a while. I am not sure anyone bargained on 20 years, but that is how it turned out. My job is to help people over time to grow in their relationship to Christ, no matter where they were when they started out.

My personal mission is not the same as Jesus', and your personal mission may not be the same as mine. But before you can deal with overload, you need to figure out what your particular mission is. So I'm giving you an assignment. I know you don't come to church to get homework, but here it is. When you get home, I want you to write a 2 or 3 sentence personal mission statement, a statement of what God wants you to do with your life right now above all else. If you are not sure about this or are struggling with this, I invite you to come and talk to me or Betsey or Brad or someone else who can help you help you think that through. This could take time, and I understand that when you are busy and feeling overwhelmed, you may not want to take time to work on a personal mission statement. But really, this may be the best investment of time you ever make. Because if you figure out what God wants you to do right now above all else, if you figure that out and commit yourself to it, all the other stuff in your life will find its proper place.

When Jesus could not do everything, he did two things: 1) he prayed and 2) he remembered his mission.

But there is also a third thing Jesus did: he invited others to work with him. Listen again to our first scripture lesson from Mark, chapter 3, starting at verse 7:

Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. ... For he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him.

Did you see how similar that is to the story in Mark, chapter 1? Once again Jesus is faced with more people needing help than he can deal with. So what does he do? Verse 13: "He went up the mountain." Luke's gospel says he went up the mountain to pray, which I think is implied by Mark. He went up the mountain to pray, and then Mark says, "He called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons."

When you can't do it all yourself, when you cannot cast out all the demons on your own, get help. Rick Melin, our Presbytery executive, has a wonderful saying that he drops on us at almost every Presbytery meeting. He says, "By the grace of God we can do together what by the design of God we cannot do alone."

When you can't do everything, do what Jesus did: 1) Stop what you are doing long enough to pray. 2) Stop what you are doing long enough to remember your mission. 3) Stop what you are doing long enough to invite others to join you. By the grace of God we can do together what by the design of God we cannot do alone.

- Ken Onstot
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