

Sermon 8 Feb 2015  
'On-going and Sustaining Ministry' Isaiah 40:21-31 Mark 1:21-28

*Prayer: As we learn how to minister in your kingdom, Lord, we begin to see the patterns of joy and happiness that emerge in the lives of those who serve you. May we live out our calling in ways that balance our worship of you and the busyness of our lives. Amen.*

Today for our reflections I have linked the Isaiah and Mark readings. We are being called to look at 'On-going and sustaining ministry'. I find there is a whole variety of ways this might be looked at. Isaiah is struggling to sustain a ministry of hope to a dispirited people in exile – and he does that with total trust in YHWH's power to love, care and keep his people.

Mark's passage I see it more as a measure of the capacity of an individual to offer ministry and as a measure of a 'ministry' in its own right. I am trying separate the ministry offered and the consequences or effect of that ministry. This distinction might be false on one level, but on another it sometimes **must be examined** to determine the validity of the ministry and the 'who' offering it.

I would think that we can all remember one (at least one) story of someone offering healing and / or preaching which is **not only NOT** like Jesus's but also could never be an outcome of his ministry. And just because a Church has people coming to worship on a Sunday does not mean it is offering a "ministry"/ or Jesus's ministry of preaching and healing. cV

Today Jesus is an example of offering on-going and sustaining ministry as an individual and for his church 'movement'. We heard how he was <sup>1\*</sup> preaching and healing – healing and preaching **because and I quote**: "both these activities represent Jesus' ministry in a nutshell". And we see the beginnings of Jesus expressing his ministry throughout Galilee. So we have both the ministry of an individual, which we understand <sup>2\*</sup> **still** represents the ministry of those who follow him; and the establishment of the community around him who followed throughout the land, ever increasing until we have the ministry of the 'Church' today.

Mark's passage today has Jesus leaving the synagogue of last week's story where he had gone to preach and paused his preaching to heal the man with the demon, and now... {as an aside: you know Mark's Gospel is really best if we were to just sit down and read it straight through – none of this business we have these days of a few verses each week! There is a natural flow we miss because of our week long pauses...} Anyway, Jesus and friends are leaving the synagogue to go to Simon-Peter's home, {another aside: it is believed his home was right next to the synagogue – (see picture (under modern Church))} **And**, as the Sabbath was over at sunset the people poured out – the **whole town**, for Jesus to heal....

And heal he does, beginning with Simon-Peter's mother in law. H Wallace <sup>3\*</sup> says Mark's Gospel begins with a "'barrage' of healing stories and accounts of casting out demons at its start." This has an effect for us, the readers to be able to recognise '**who**' is **proclaiming** the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Each of the stories in their own way pick up on the theme of divine power which is lying just beyond **our** earthly experiences but is perceptible to those who 'hear and understand' **and wait**. cV

So right at the start of Jesus' ministry in Mark we are reminded of the one who is sovereign over all creation, who can strengthen the weak and faint, whose word is one of promise and hope, and who is present in the activity and proclamation of Jesus. We are given every justification for hope and confidence in the coming of God among us.

But just as it was with Isaiah's people however, realising that hope is not always easy and that is one of the understandings scholars have as to why we have this magnificent passage today. Isaiah's people needed "hope" an ability to actively wait for the Lord to do what He must do despite 'life's happenings'.

1\* Katheryn M-Huey 2\* Mike Graves (*Feasting on the Word Year B, Vol. 1*). 3\* H Wallace, \*4 Seasons MediaCom,

What Isaiah's people wanted was to be released from exile in Babylon and go home – well some did, others had settled down and intermarried and... but some just wanted to go home and struggled with what seemed like God's 'absence', lack of attention to their prayers, struggled with the faith. ->

The generation in exile that Isaiah was ministering to, we are perfectly entitled to imagine<sup>3\*</sup> that as deported refugees they **were insecure; and** an *almost expected outcome* is that they **lacked faith. *Their*** grandparents had experienced the horrors of military conquest, the destruction of their Temple and forced removal from their homeland. ***Their*** parents *and they* had only known the oppression and rule of the Babylonians **and their** god, Marduk.

**Isaiah** has the ministry task of moving a tired and numb people from passivity to action *as one writer* puts it. They are the people who, in their plight, cannot imagine that Yahweh has any regard for them (Isa 40:27), can't believe that God – YHWH God still cares. So we have in our few verses Isaiah's arguments that despite their being in exile, God is intimately involved in all aspects of human life and is able to save them, His people. <sup>\*4</sup> Hope isn't always easy, life has this way of coming between – and yet Isaiah says God's faithfulness is the source of strength and power to restore and liberate.

<sup>\*3</sup>We may not be in physical exile in the church today, but there are enough 'powers' in our governments, our media-outlets, and society who continue to play on our insecurities, our hopelessness, and our malaise, that we are overwhelmed by another kind of exile wherein it is hard to see a future or to hear the call of God toward the kingdom that Jesus personified.

How do we offer a ministry – the ministry that Jesus invited us into – healing and preaching in our world today? How do we make sure we are true to our source of power and remain sourced by that power so that we are sustained in ministry as described by Isaiah and still offer an on-going ministry as Jesus did?

If we do not learn how to sustain ourselves there is no on-going ministry. One of the causes of loss of ministry offering is burn-out. And burn-out or illness / loss of health does surface in self or church and is exactly that – loss, so that if left untreated burn-out destroys ministry.

<sup>1\*</sup> George Bernard Shaw wrote: "This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of nature **instead of** a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."!!! Not recognised and left un-treated our lives and ministry slide into places which are dry / dust-filled / black and hopeless... not sustained, not on-going.

Isaiah says it doesn't have to be that way because YHWH is our God. Jesus showed that his good news included our 'lifting' up into full life again – whether you were the mother in law of a good friend or a stranger waiting in the courtyard. BUT – but serving without replenishment, without re-charging, without waiting on the Lord with hope, will not have good ending – is not sustainable going forward.

So serving and ministering like Jesus with hope and full power is a joy making our lives truly happy – how do we sustain it and go on? There are two pointers from Jesus today – 1. Don't let the crowd's desire for miracles rather than Good News dictate the shape of ministry; 2. Make time to listen – to pray – to be with God alone or you won't make it at all!

**28** Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. **29** He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. **30** Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; **31** but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. “

Be sustained and sustain, build/ lift up offering hope to the world, that Jesus ministry is on-going. Amen.

<sup>1\*</sup> Katheryn M-Huey <sup>2\*</sup> Mike Graves (*Feasting on the Word Year B, Vol. 1*). <sup>3\*</sup> H Wallace, <sup>\*4</sup> Seasons MediaCom,