

+In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier Amen.

MARK 1.29-39

I believe that one of the most important questions that people can ask themselves is: “Why am I here?”

And as I meditated on this question in relation to the Gospel reading for today, I remembered a note I once saw in a shop window when I lived in Darwin some years ago. It simply read “Our mission is to analyse the situation, and, through foresight and advanced planning, avoid or circumvent problems before they arise. Should the unexpected occur, our aim is to arrive swiftly and efficiently at a workable solution. However, when you are up to your arm-pits in crocodiles, it is difficult to remember that the initial objective was to drain the swamp.”

Now although crocodiles are not a first-hand experience of life around beautiful Mullumbimby, the quote still highlights the question “Why are we here?”

And it seems to me that it also highlights the pressing and unavoidable distractions that we are required to deal with on a regular basis in everyday life that can distract us from our Central Task – if we are not disciplined!

This is not only true for people in life generally – it is also a problem for Churches. There are so many calls on our attention – but – Why are we here?

What is Christ’s call on us individually and collectively as a community of faith?

The Gospel tells us that Jesus was in Capernaum where he had been teaching in the synagogue and the people were amazed and began to ask “What is this? It’s a new teaching – and with authority!” “He even gives order to the evil spirits and they obey him” V.27

And the story continues today saying “And as soon as they left the synagogue...” so we know it was still the Sabbath. Mark tells us that Jesus, James and John went to Simon Peter and Andrew’s house where Peter’s mother-in-law was dangerously ill in bed with a fever. So, the family informs Jesus of her condition and Jesus responds to her need. And while Jesus is standing over her, he takes her hand and God’s healing energy courses through every fibre of his being – flowing out of him and into the woman, dissolving the fever in love. The newly healed woman then gets out of bed and begins to offer 1st Century Mediterranean hospitality to the guests in her house.

Word spreads rapidly and the story continues “that evening after sunset”. The ‘after sunset’ detail is important because it tells us that the Sabbath is over. Sabbath starts at sunset on Friday evening and finishes at sunset on Saturday. And it was after sunset that the people of Capernaum began to bring many sick people to the door of Peter’s house to see Jesus. Jesus heals them and eventually we are told every citizen of the town is gathered around the doorway of the house and Jesus patiently lays his hands on each of them allowing the healing restorative Spirit within him to flow through to them.

Yet, even in all of this, the clamouring negative energies in some people disrupt the gentle healing atmosphere by trying to turn the sacred moment into a show of wonder working.

They want to cloak Jesus with the image of either a Magician Messiah or a Political Revolutionary.

Yet, Jesus refuses to go down this road and rebukes the voices and orders them to be silent. Jesus wants this to be an occasion for people to be taken into a deeper awareness of who God wishes them to be. He does not want it to turn into an exhibition or a side-show. Because wonders do not necessarily call forth deep faith and trust and Jesus desires to open the eyes of the people to a

transformed relationship with God that can set the arena for much more wonderful healing to continue for them after he has moved on.

And then long before day breaks, Jesus does off to a desolate place to immerse himself in prayer – in awareness of the One to whom he belongs – the One who sent him. Simon Peter and his companions go off to look for Jesus and when they eventually find him they say “Are you aware that everyone is clamouring to know where you are?”

However, Jesus says “I can’t be the property of any one particular group. My call is to preach God’s mercy and justice and this good news must not be any one person or group’s monopoly. So he moves on to proclaim his message in the synagogues and towns and casts out oppressive and destructive spirits.

SO, why had Jesus come?

I think it is helpful for us to bear in mind that as we read through all the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we clearly see throughout the differing Gospel accounts – that healing and deliverance were a major part of the ministry of Jesus.

His Divine love was always moved and motivated by human need. But it was not his central mission. And when people started to follow him for that purpose alone – Jesus always moved on.

As Jesus moved about from town to town, healing continued to be an important part of his overall ministry. However, it was always secondary to his primary purpose.

The Gospel tell us “Jesus travelled right throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons!”

In Harold Taylor’s book “Sent to Heal”, the point is made that “healing is an expression of the Kingdom which has arrived in Jesus and it is a very present reality in our world today. It is a sign that God’s power has entered into the world and people can experience the presence and power of God in their lives – as God brings forth healing and restoration.”

Taylor continues “it is apparent that the full blessings of the Kingdom are not yet present – and will only be fully revealed at the end time which means that some healing is to be experienced as a Kingdom blessing here and now, but our complete healing will not be possible until the Kingdom is fully established”. (Sent to Heal pp.31-32)

So, in a sense, we understand that healing in this world is never total – not 100% in this lifetime. We recall that after Lazarus had been raised to life by Jesus – he had to die again. And we know that not all people are healed in this life. The healings that do occur are a sign of the presence of the Kingdom and are a foretaste of heaven itself where we are told in Revelation “There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Rev. 21.4).

And that is why preaching the Gospel – the good news of the Kingdom – was always the major focus of the ministry of Jesus. This caused him to move on to another place when people began to follow him just to see more of the miraculous.

Jesus’ compassion reached out to people in their need – yet he did not allow himself to be diverted from the ultimate purpose of his coming,

In Luke 9.51-55 we read “as the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to

prepare things for his arrival but the people did not welcome him - because he was heading to Jerusalem”.

When the disciples James and John saw this they asked “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy these people?” but Jesus said “No – just leave them to themselves – and he moved on to another place”

Very early in Luke’s Gospel we learn that the mission of Jesus would lead him to the Cross. There was much to be done and all in the space of around 3 years. And the top priority of Jesus was always to preach the good news and teach people the way to live in love for God and for one another.

And now we may ask – “Why are we here?”

Primarily, we are here because we are followers of Jesus. We are here as the people who gather to worship the Lord and seek to fulfil the Mission that has been handed to us by Him.

So, exactly what is that mission?

I believe we have the answer in Jesus’ own final words before his Ascension when he said to his followers:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go – for I am sending you now to make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember – you are not alone – I am with you always – even until the very end of the age” (Matt. 28.18-20)

The specifics of how we do that have to be worked out in terms of our own time and space. However, we should always remember that this is the grand plan. This is the primary mission. We are called to reach out to people in love – and to bring them into relationship with Jesus.

There will be many calls on our time and energies which are important, but which are not directly related to the core purpose of our Mission and our Commission from Jesus.

And my friends this is where we are invited to realise that these distractions are the “crocodiles” that are be dealt with in order to get on with the real mission ahead.

We are called to always remember – that the most important things of all is our commitment to Jesus. And this starts in every believer’s heart along with our very personal response to him.

We are invited to realise that Jesus still invites us all to live in Him as He lives in us. And the good news for all of us today my friends is that we are all invited to share in his Mission as we wait for him to come again in glory.

So let us commit ourselves afresh to his purpose today! Let us remember that we are all healed, restored and forgiven in Him, as he leads us, blesses us and protects us in His holy name. Amen.

