

Mark 1:29-39 (NRSV)

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

30 Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.

31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.

33 And the whole city was gathered around the door.

34 And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

36 And Simon and his companions hunted for him.

37 When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you."

38 He answered, "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."

39 And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Action is the presence of God

Everyone has a turning point event in their life. I think most of us have had a turning point, an event that shaped us into the person we are today. For me, there have been countless events that have shaped me into the person I am today. But there is one event that stands out in my mind. It was a spontaneous meeting with a pastor when I did not pass the Provisional Elder from the Board of Ordained Ministry in GNJ.

In 2017, I joined my first Provisional Elder Retreat in Greater New Jersey. At the time, I had just served two small churches (an American church and a Korean church) for eight months. I had an interview scheduled in February, and the church was doing some major construction, remodeling the youth group room as the thrift store. I was working on the remodeling work. I was preparing for the M.Div. degree graduation, preparing two services for every Sunday, and preparing for the Provisional Elder Retreat. I think that time, Jan-Feb 2017, was the most chaotic month of my life. Also, Luke was born at that time too. Luke was born the Sunday after I finished the retreat.

At the time, the elders of GNJ suggested that I stop what I was doing at the church and focus on the interview for the retreat. They said that if I followed what they said, I would be able to pass the interview, which means the retreat is very difficult. However, I couldn't stop what I was doing and focus on the interview for the retreat. Later, I attended the retreat. It was three days of interviews with four sessions. And I did not become a Provisional Elder that year.

When I first received the phone call from the Board of Ordained Ministry that they decided I was Not Ready to be the Provisional Elder, I didn't feel anything. Because I had a lot of work to do at that time. I still had to organize two worship services. I also had to finish the

church renovations. (Oh, I loved to shovel snow as well, Sorry Luke. You were out of my mind. I was so busy at that time)

But as time passed, the outcome of the interview became difficult for me to accept. I had failed. What if I had taken a break from what I was doing and just focused on the interview? What if I were appointed to a single church so I could prepare for the retreat more easily? These thoughts kept running through my mind.

I even found it annoying to meet with the United Methodist pastors. I hated being questioned and listening to their analysis of why I failed the interview.

Their answers after I told my story were always consistent. It was that if I served one church, one church full-time, it would all work out. I began to worry because everyone I met was telling me that. At the time, I was at a tipping point between steadily preparing for the ordination process and working diligently in ministry.

Around that time, I met a pastor. His computer had failed and he was worried that he had deleted some of the materials on it. So, I went over and fixed his computer and got everything back. It was August and it was a hot day. The pastor brought watermelon, which I love, and we ate it together and chatted a bit about my situation. Naturally, we started talking about my rejection from the ordination process and I opened up to him and shared my heart. I was faced with a dilemma: whether to seek a new assignment for ordination, or to be grateful for the ministry I had now. (Actually, there was another issue for me, and it was an immigration issue. I needed a full-time church to apply for and receive a green card, and my current church was not full-time, so the future of my status was unclear.) He wore horn-rimmed glasses and kept his eyes on the table as he listened to my story.

After listening to my story, he said the following to me.

"Pastor Lim, I don't think that just because you pass the ordination process and become an Elder, that makes you a true pastor. I don't think you should use ministry as a way to become an Elder. If you use ministry as a tool to be an Elder, then you would use the church as a tool even after you become an Elder. Pastoral care is a calling that God has given to pastors. So, it's about keeping the position that God has given you. I think you can be in that position and not get a "yes" from the Board of Ordained Ministry. You may do a good job in ministry and serve your church and never become a full member "maybe for the rest of your life." (The system is the system.) However, pastors are not called to be full members or elders. You are called by God to serve the church and the world. So, if you can serve God's church so well, even if you never become a full member, I think that's right. I want my pastor's goal to be God, not full membership. God will work through the pastor, not with your ordination status."

He didn't encourage me directly, but the words were encouraging to me. At the very least, it felt like God's comforting words, in response to my ministry. After that, he became my (voluntary) mentor, and he still is my ministry mentor. I was busy with a lot of things at the time, and he reminded me of a very important point I had forgotten. It was the day I realized that the calling of a pastor is to stand with the congregation to reveal and witness that God is with us.

The Bible tells us all about the encounter between God and God's people. The Gospels give us the stories of people who met Jesus. It is a collection of stories of people being changed by Jesus alone.

AND THE MINISTRY OF JESUS was aimed at revealing God.

In fact, in Jesus' day, he wasn't the only religious leader preaching about God. The teachings of the religious leaders were limited to the law. The religious leaders could not go beyond the realm of the Sabbath. That's why they couldn't be with the demon-possessed.

Sick people were understood to be sick because they were sinners. They considered it a sin to be with sinners and rejected them. If religious leaders shared God only with believers, who would come to God? To make matters worse, they had social and political power and authority.

Therefore, their teachings did not reveal God's presence in their lives. In the Gospels, we see the power of Jesus. He casts out demons. He heals the sick. It's truly amazing. But there's something we often miss when we focus on the brilliance. It's the way Jesus reaches out to people.

At the heart of the gospel, God is with us. But Jesus' teachings were different from the rhetoric of the religious leaders. Jesus came into the depths of people's lives. And it was there that he demonstrated by his life that God is with us.

So naturally, the ministries of Jesus made him popular.

In the second half of today's story, Jesus became a favorite among the people. Everyone was looking for him. If Jesus had stayed there and continued to preach, heal, and cast out demons, he would have had an even greater ministry.

But then Jesus says the following to Simon and his companions:

"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 clearly knew God's purpose for sending him to this earth. His goal wasn't to become famous on this earth, but to be recognized and liked by people.

His goal was to reveal God. In the Bible, God is described as invisible. One of the strong ways God reveals Godself is through our behavior, attitudes, and actions, and by speaking through our lives.

It is in these places in our lives that God is fully revealed. When we get down to the lowest place, sometimes even when we don't want to, God works through us in that low place.

Let's go back to the story I shared at the beginning. When I met that pastor, I realized the most important value of being a pastor. I was called to reveal God's good works through my actions.

From that point, I was able to serve the church as much as I could. Also, God sent appropriate people in order to extend our ministries. I had very creative ministry experiences during that time. I focused on God and God's ministry through the churches, then God did(solved) the rest.

Dears sisters and brothers in Christ, God is invisible to the eyes of humans. But our good actions, deeds, and behavior raise the power to make the invisible God visible. That's what it says: sacrament, the means of grace, that God uses the channel to extend Godself.

Never forget that you are God's living temple. Do not forget that you yourself are a sacrament used by God.

Let us pray.

Let us not be misled by what we see. May we be a church and a people who reveal God. In so doing, we can live as the channel of God. Let us be your evidence that God is with us. In Jesus's name, we pray. Amen.