

Notes for Next Sunday

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Isaiah 40:21-31). Sixth-century Israelites in Babylon lived in exilic hopelessness. Full of despair, the people doubted if the Lord could free them and bring them home. Is 40:12–20 announces that the Lord was—and is—the one and only God. He is transcendent over creation (40:12) and history (40:15–17). He is unlike the idols of Babylon (40:19–20); indeed, the Lord cannot be compared with anyone or anything else (40:18). The Lord is the Creator and King who exercises a full monopoly of power and authority. Contrary to the gods and goddesses of Babylon, the Lord is not a nationalistic deity or an individualistic idol. He is the only true God.

Epistle (1 Corinthians 9:16-27). As founder of the Corinthian Church, and as an apostle, Paul is perceived to have more “rights” than anyone else. Yet he consistently sets an example for the Corinthians, encouraging them to put off their own rights in order to serve one another. This is taught and modeled by Jesus Himself (Mk 10:45). His death and resurrection transform our lives so that we do not seek our own good but the good of others (Php 2:1–11).

Gospel (Mark 1:29-39). Jesus’ first day of public ministry—the Sabbath—is a busy one. Given the endless series of things to which Jesus attends, we sometimes imagine that He is too busy for us and our problems. But Jesus knows and cares for each of us individually. He actually commands us to lay all our needs before Him and stands ever willing and able to help us.

Though Jesus has much more to do among the people of Capernaum, He makes time for private devotion and then insists on moving on to visit other towns and villages. His unswerving adherence to the right priorities stands in sharp contrast with our own tendency to lose focus, allow others to set our agenda, and put lesser things above what is most important. Given our weaknesses, it is reassuring that Jesus keeps things straight. His highest goal was, and is, to fulfill the Father’s command that He save the lost.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 40:21-31

²¹ Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? ²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. ²³ He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. ²⁴ No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. ²⁵ “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One. ²⁶ Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. ²⁷ Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God”? 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.

40:21 do you not know...not heard...been told...not understood. The four questions of this verse are blunt challenges to all who create God in their own image and make idols. God has not hidden Himself. He has revealed Himself from the beginning. (PBC)

40:22 sits enthroned...circle. Or “horizon.” Firmament. Everything appears small before God. (TLSB)

40:22 stretches out the heavens. As a man might with infinite ease spread out a light veil, so it in days of old cost the Lord no more effort when He for the first time created and “spread out the heavens.” Or, as a man pitches a tent, with ease in quick order, this being a common occupation among men, with the ease the Lord spread out the heavens like a tent to dwell in. (Leupold)

40:26 each by name. They are like a huge army that appears overhead as if created anew every night. The stars march across the sky in unbroken ranks. Nations viewed the stars as visible representations of the gods (Am 5:26). Israel succumbed to the temptation of worshiping the stars (2Ki 17:16; 21:3), which in turn brought about exile. (TLSB)

40:28 his understanding no one can fathom. While God both loves His people and has power to save them, His plans unfold in ways we would not imagine. (CC)

40:29 gives strength to the weary. He not only does not lack strength. He supplies it, supplies every bit of strength that man may ever need or has needed. (Leupold)

40:30 grow tired ... stumble. We are creatures, not the Creator. We grow weary and weak. We can understand some things, but we are often confused and ignorant. We must learn; God knows all things. Without the Lord the best humans will stumble and fall. The young appear to be tireless and energetic; yet they too will certainly grow weary and stumble. To such limited creatures, God promises to give strength. (PBC)

40:31 renew. Lit. “exchange.” Faith in the Lord brings this strength. When we rely on human strength, we will stumble. When we trust in the Lord for strength, he gives it. Not only will believers receive strength; they will renew their strength. They will arise from the ashes of grief and suffering to run and walk again. (PBC)

EPISTLE – 1 Corinthians 9:16-27

¹⁶ Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷ If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. ¹⁹ Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. ²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. ²⁷ No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

9:16 compelled to preach. Paul can claim no credit for his preaching; he is under orders to do it. God told Ananias before he baptized Paul, “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15). (PBC)

9:17 entrusted with a stewardship. He cannot expect a citation simply for having done his duty. Like a steward he was simply carrying out his responsibility. (PBC)

9:19 I make myself a slave to everyone. Not only did Paul not use his right to material support in preaching the gospel but he also deprived himself—curtailed his personal privileges and social and religious rights—in dealing with different kinds of people. (CSB)

9:21 I became like one not having the law. Paul accommodated himself to Gentile culture when it did not violate his allegiance to Christ, though he still reckoned that he was under God’s law and Christ’s law. (By “Christ’s law” Paul is probably referring to Christ’s teachings, though the term is not necessarily restricted to them.) (CSB)

9:22 I have become all things. Where no principle was at stake Paul was prepared to go to extreme lengths to meet people. Every true servant of Christ must learn from the apostle not to despise anyone, not to permit disgust over foolish weaknesses to enter his heart.

9:25 self-control. Avoiding what hinders success in the race. Here it is the insistence on “rights” that destroy the faith of others. (TLSB)

9:27 I beat my body and make it my slave. Here Paul uses the figure of boxing to represent the Christian life. He does not aimlessly beat the air, but he severely disciplines his own body in serving Christ. (CSB)

9:27 not be disqualified for the prize. Paul realizes that he must with rigor serve the Lord and battle against sin. If he fails in this, he may be excluded from the reward (see 3:10–15). (CSB)

GOSPEL – Mark 1:29-39

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. ³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was. ³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!” ³⁸ Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

1:29 to the home of Simon and Andrew. Jesus and the disciples probably went there for a meal, since the main Sabbath meal was served immediately following the synagogue service. (CSB)

1:30 Simon’s mother-in-law. Peter was plainly a married man. 1 Corinthians 9:5 clearly says that Peter took his wife along on his preaching tours. (Buls)

1:31 fever left her...began to wait on them. Indicates the completeness and instantaneousness of her recovery. (TLSB)

1:32 the people brought. They waited until the Sabbath was over (after sunset) before carrying anything. (CSB)

1:34 because they knew who he was. Luke says, “because they knew he was the Christ” (Lk 4:41). Jesus probably wanted first to show by word and deed the kind of Messiah he was (in contrast to popular notions) before he clearly declared himself, and he would not let the demons frustrate this intent. (CSB)

1:35 solitary place, where he prayed. Though Jesus had plenty to do in Capernaum (vv 29-34), He nonetheless retreated into the wilderness in order to pray. The Gospels repeatedly depict Jesus spending time alone in prayer (cf 6:46; Lk. 5:16; 6:12). (TLSB)

1:36 they found him. That they found him suggests that they were aware of his practice of going apart by himself to pray. (PBC)

1:38 go elsewhere. Jesus refused to stay within the friendly confines of Capernaum. He was committed to preaching, exorcising demons and healing throughout Israel. (TLSB)

1: 39 throughout Galilee. Josephus described Galilee as a land of great villages: “The cities lie very thick and the very many villages that are here are everywhere so very full of people, because the richness of their soil, that the very least of them contained more than 15,000 inhabitants. (Lane)