

It had been quite a day for Jesus. Beginning at the Sabbath service that morning in the synagogue, when he drove out the demons, and now, that *same* Sabbath afternoon, healing Simon Peter's mother-in-law from that fever. It maybe would have been a good idea for the friends of Jesus to try to keep these healings quiet-- it *was* still the Sabbath, and healing was considered work, and the Law said "*no working on the Sabbath.*" But, the news of Jesus and his wonder-working just kind of went viral. The townspeople managed to wait until sundown, after the Sabbath was over, before they came to Jesus. Then, in the fading light, Jesus still was healing. And all the demons –silenced, just like that. People made whole again. Wow! Quite the sensation, this Jesus!

Jesus had told his new disciples that they would be fishing for people from now on – and wow, what a catch they were hauling in on that day! But what looks to them—and *well, to us, let's be honest*-- like a huge success-- for *Jesus*, becomes . . . a sleepless night. So, Jesus did what we see Jesus doing throughout the Gospels. He goes out alone to pray. He takes himself away to a deserted place to pray, early before the paparazzi appear and the needy or merely curious crowded around him *again*.

The word that Mark uses for "*deserted place*" (in Greek *eremos*,) has already occurred four times in Mark, in the quotation from Isaiah-- *the voice of one crying in the wilderness* (v. 3), as John the Baptist also appears in the *wilderness* (v. 4), and twice in the Mark's brief account of Jesus' temptation in the "*wilderness*" (vs. 12-13). The word "*wilderness*," in short, already points to a place where good and evil wrestle for power over the human heart.

This is the arena of temptation, a sleepless night wrestling in the wilderness. While Jesus is at prayer, the tempter appears again – *this time* through the words of Simon Peter and the others. They have finally found Jesus. "Where did you go, Jesus? *Everyone* is searching for you. We could hardly work our way through the crowds around the house. Jesus, come on back, you're doing *great* in Capernaum."

So, the voice of the tempter comes again, and again Jesus has a critical decision to make. What kind of messiah is he going to be? A powerful and popular one who gives the crowd whatever they want? He could *make his name and gain his fame*, right out of the gate. *Tempting*. Or will he be one who follows God's purposes, no matter where they lead? Capernaum and the clinging crowds, or a faithful journey to the cross?

How often are *we* like Peter, tempted by visions of glory by the standards of *this world*? Jesus is praying because he must deal with the *treachery of success*. Facing this threat, what does he do? He turns to God in prayer to see how God wants him to serve. Success *can* be the toughest temptation of all. Jesus realized that such glorious success could easily end up working against his mission. Maybe like his earlier wrestling in the wilderness, Jesus was tempted once again to embrace short-term success rather than enduring faithfulness to his purposes, no matter what.

Hebrews (2:17-18; 3:15) says that Jesus became like us in every respect and was tested so that he could help us in the day of our testing. So, we shouldn't be troubled by the fact that Jesus had to wrestle and pray. This need is not *bad* news, like some sort of short-coming in Jesus. This is *good* news. Good news because Hebrews also says that while Jesus was *tested*, he *did not sin* (3:15). Jesus may well have spent that night before he left Capernaum wondering whether he should stick around and build on the praise and glory, to follow the path of earthly success. After all, there was so much need in those people's lives, and, well, who can argue with numbers? Like you and like me, I think Jesus had to *work* and *watch* and *wait* to be clear about God's will. Jesus had to listen for God. God calls us to *faithfulness*, and often we have to wait for God's brand of success to work itself out, in the midst of what may seem like never-ending struggle and even "weary to the bone" heart-breaking loss and failure.

There was a fellow named Clarence Jordan, who had heard God's call to serve the poor, and in the 1940s, founded a farm down in Americus, Georgia. He called it Koinonia Farm and it was here that the idea for Habitat for Humanity was born.

Jordan had two Ph.D.s, one in agriculture and one in New Testament Studies. He could have chosen to do anything he wanted. But *Koinonia Farm* was his calling. It was a community for poor whites and poor blacks, *together*. As you might guess, such an idea *did not go over very well* in the Deep South of the '40s.

Much of this resistance came from good church people who followed the laws and customs of segregation as much as the other folk in town. The townspeople tried everything to stop Clarence and the Farm. They tried boycotting what was produced at his Farm, and slashing the workers' tires when they came to town. Over and over, for years, they tried and *tried* to stop him.

Finally, in 1954, the Ku Klux Klan had had enough of Clarence Jordan, so they decided to get rid of him once and for all. They came one night with guns and torches and set fire to every building on Koinonia Farm except Clarence's home, which they riddled with bullets. And they chased off all the families on the Farm, except one black family which just refused to leave. From beneath their hoods, Clarence recognized the voices of many of the Klansmen, and he knew that some of them were active church people. Another was a reporter from the local newspaper.

The next day, that same reporter, presumably *without* the hood, came out to see what remained of the farm. The rubble still smoldered and the land was scorched, but he found Clarence in the field, hoeing and planting. "*I heard the awful news,*" he called to Clarence, "*and I came out to do a story on the tragedy of your farm closing.*"

Clarence just kept on hoeing and planting. The reporter kept prodding, kept poking, trying to get a rise from this quietly determined man who seemed to be *planting* his seeds instead of *packing* his bags. So, finally, the reporter said in an icy, uppity tone, "Well, *Dr.* Jordan, you got *two* of them Ph.D.'s and you've put fourteen years into this farm, and there's nothing left of it at all. Just *how* successful do you think you've been?"

Clarence stopped hoeing, he turned toward the reporter, looked him right in the eye, and said quietly but firmly, “*Oh, about as successful as the cross.* Sir, I don’t think you understand us at all. What we are about is *not* success but *faithfulness*. We’re staying.”

After time spent in prayer, Jesus is empowered to confront the Tempter who lures him with popularity and importance: “*Everyone is searching for you, Jesus. Come on, get with it.*” Out of his prayerful search for God’s will comes the answer unexpected in our world: “*No, let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also,*” Jesus tells them, “*for that is why I have begun this ministry among the people.*” On to the next town and the next, teaching and healing; and in time, on to Jerusalem where the legalized lynch mob waits for him.

The prayers of Jesus renew his strength, just as the prophet Isaiah promises “*Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*” Lord, as we make our way toward the spiritual preparations of Lent, hold us in the palm of your hand, and help us to resist the temptation to turn in on ourselves; give us your Spirit to seek service instead of success.