

**Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2025**

**Practicing the Way. Week 4 The Practices: Creating space for transformation.  
Tom Yacomeni**

**Mark 1v21-38 A day in the life of Jesus**

*<sup>21</sup> They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. <sup>22</sup> The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. <sup>23</sup> Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, <sup>24</sup> “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”*

*<sup>25</sup> “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” <sup>26</sup> The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.*

*<sup>27</sup> The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” <sup>28</sup> News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.*

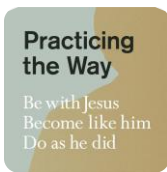
*<sup>29</sup> As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. <sup>30</sup> Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. <sup>31</sup> So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.*

*<sup>32</sup> That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. <sup>33</sup> The whole town gathered at the door, <sup>34</sup> 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.*

*<sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> Simon and his companions went to look for him, <sup>37</sup> and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”*

*<sup>38</sup> Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”*

Today is the fourth week of our Lent sermon series based on John Mark Comer’s book and course Practicing the Way. It has been really exciting to see new midweek groups forming, young people joining in and so many people talking about spiritual formation and discipleship. I know the material can be challenging at times but with 2025 being our Year of *discipleship* it is so encouraging that we are wrestling together spiritually so thank you for working to build as a church family and community.



Last week we looked at how spiritual transformation takes place over time as we undergo a process of what could be called *counter-formation*. When we realise that we are subconsciously being shaped and formed by forces that can corrode our souls, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us replace unhelpful habits, thinking and relationships with the spiritual practices, Godly teaching and wholesome community that can help us become more like Jesus. When the storms of life hit and we go through suffering, we discover that it is during those times we can learn the most as we rebuild our lives on solid foundations.

So this week we are looking at some of the practicalities and practices that can help us become more like Jesus and do what he did. None of these things are new ideas - Christians have been practicing them down the centuries. But in our world that is increasingly overwhelmed by busyness and distraction, rediscovering these ancient rhythms and priorities can be essential for recovering spiritual vitality. They are based on observations of Jesus' life and his priorities so today we begin with first chapter of Mark's gospel which gives us a fascinating insight into Jesus' life and the practices he followed. Mark describes a day or rather 24 hours in the life of Jesus, from a Sabbath Saturday to early on Sunday morning. At first sight from the way it is written it can seem like a really hectic day, but underneath it all Jesus is calmly focussed on what he has come to do.

Discipleship is not about simply shedding our responsibilities and sitting like a hermit in a cave somewhere. It is about emulating Jesus who was able to sleep peacefully during the storm, and was able to weave spiritual practices into his day that grounded him in the presence of God.

I always call Mark the no-nonsense Gospel because everything seems to happen at break-neck speed and he often introduces the story with terms like 'just then', 'immediately' or 'suddenly'. We started this series with Jesus calling the first disciples *without delay*, who in turn *immediately* left their nets to follow him. Today's passage then gets on with the action:

<sup>21</sup>They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.

So the first events of Jesus' public ministry took place on the Sabbath which Jews practiced from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday.

Jesus took Sabbath seriously. He went to the synagogue and wanted to share in worship by teaching from the scriptures. Sabbath is the first of the practices or classical disciplines that allow us to make space for God to move. One day in seven we rest, worship and delight in the good things of God's creation. Genesis 2v3 <sup>3</sup> *Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.* If you think about the creation narrative, Adam and Eve's very first day was spent joining with God in Sabbath rest.

So Sabbath is actually the primary spiritual discipline, the original holy space ordained by God for worship, rest, delight and wonder.

During my lifetime, we have gone from being a nation that rested together one day in seven to every day being a potential work day like any other. So implementing proper sabbath will be a challenge as it is a clear act of counter-formation. Like me you may need to choose a different day of the week from Sunday to set apart for rest and recreation, but whenever it is, it is an act of trust in the Lord that if we stop working, he will redeem the time and actually make life more productive.

What does it take for you to rest and connect with God? Perhaps for you it is getting out in nature, going for a walk or spending time with friends or family. This last Friday I went fishing. Not in a river but clearing out our pond which had developed a leak over the winter. Amazingly we still have 56 fish, a dozen newts, 5 toads, and 3 scary looking creatures which I think are dragonfly larvae. But as we were clearing sludge and saving the fish, it was amazing how many sermon illustrations were popping into my mind. It took quite a lot of effort trying to convince the fish that we are trying to help them rather than let them suffer in their own sludge! Hopefully the fish were happy when they realised what was really happening.



When the people heard Jesus, they were amazed at his authority, because he clearly taught with the wisdom and understanding that comes from spending time in the Father's presence and the care that comes from knowing his will. The amazing thing is that he gave us that same authority at the ascension so we can share the grace of God with confidence. Jesus paid the price for God's forgiveness and acceptance on the cross. Practices such as Sabbath enable us to spend time in God's presence so we can discern his will and join in with his plans.

As Jesus advanced the Kingdom through his teaching from the scriptures on the sabbath, the spiritual backlash wasn't far behind.

Have you ever been obedient and taken a spiritual risk only to find things go wrong and people start kicking off?

The NIV is a bit naughty translating the man in verse 23 as being *possessed*. The text simply says there was a man in the synagogue *with* an unclean spirit which is a lot less culturally loaded. But nevertheless the peaceful atmosphere was shattered:

<sup>24</sup>“What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

This was true of course but the people were being distracted from engaging with Jesus' message and teaching.

So Jesus sternly rebuked the spirit and the man was set free right there and then, restoring calm and allowing everyone's attention to fix back on God's grace.

The devil doesn't like it when we make space for God to move. Be prepared for backlash as you prioritise the Lord in your life, but be assured you have the authority to restore peace in Jesus' name.

So after an exciting morning at church, Jesus and the four disciples went back for lunch to Simon Peter and Andrew's house. We note that Simon Peter must have been married because his mother-in-law was sick in bed. But Jesus took her by the hand and she was healed. We're not told if he even said anything but just taking her by the hand was enough. She got up and wanted to join in with serving the meal as she liked to do.

Community and Hospitality were important for Jesus as part of his sabbath day practice. Hebrews explicitly mentions hospitality as something we should practice because we might be entertaining Angels without even knowing it. Hospitality is another discipline which makes space for God's presence. Eating together, especially if we welcome God's presence with us as we eat is a conduit for blessing.

So we are about half way through Jesus' first day of public ministry and we have already several of the Spiritual practices in play

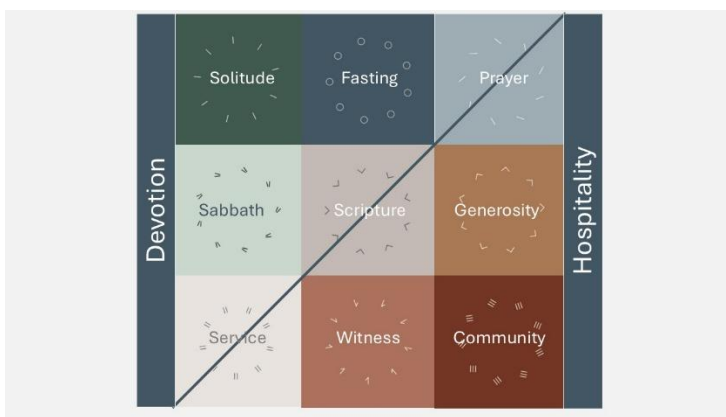
Sabbath | Scripture | Community |

But also the importance of hospitality.

The practicing the way course highlights 9 practices:



But with a bit of solitaire I think they broadly fit into two categories: Devotion to God and Hospitality towards people.



This is very fitting because of course the greatest commandments are to love God and love others. We love others by blessing them with hospitality and testimony, by generously giving away our tithes and offerings as well as our time in service. We love God by devoting ourselves as living sacrifices and fragrant offerings to him.

Under the power of the Holy Spirit the practices help us love God and love others, just as Jesus did.

Now although Mark goes straight on to the next part of the story I think there would have been time for Jesus and his disciples to enjoy some rest after their meal before the end of the day. A sabbath afternoon snooze perhaps?

But then the sun went down and that was when the next working week began. Verse 33 says the whole town turned up at the door!

Remember that the Jews interpreted Sabbath as a strict list of don'ts. You couldn't walk more than 2000 cubits – about half a mile, and you certainly couldn't carry a sick person anywhere. Jesus would go on to challenge this mentality of prohibition in favour of sabbath blessing but in the meantime they all came at sundown.

Jesus healed the sick and delivered the oppressed but asked them to keep quiet about it because he didn't want hype to distort his message or misinformation to raise false

expectations. Of course we know that by the time he rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, you could say he had somewhat failed in this respect. The people wanted a Messiah to save them in every respect, but particularly from the Roman occupation. But Jesus' kingdom is not of this world and he wanted that to be the priority.

Whenever God's word and the Gospel of the kingdom is preached, lives are transformed. Jesus preached the word and people came looking for healing and deliverance. Our priority is to share the life and message of Jesus and then to look for signs of the kingdom breaking out. We always offer prayer at the end of services at All Saints, praying that the Kingdom will come here in Weston, just as it is in heaven. What are you asking the Lord for today?

Finally we read about Jesus taking himself off to pray in a solitary place. Being alone with God creates space for him to speak to us, and for us to discern his priorities.



I find it fascinating that through prayer, Jesus was able to say 'No' to the immediate clamours for him to return to continue ministry in Capernaum. Jesus recaptured his vision – bringing his presence and the message of the Kingdom to the whole world, not just one village.

Perhaps as we pray and fast over this lent season, it could be that God gives you a bigger vision. It could be that he wants you to stop something, in order that you can pick something else up.

Whatever he is asking you to do, the 9 practices will help you open your heart to the Holy Spirit so that you can be with Jesus, become like him and do what he did.