**MARK BLOG WEEK THREE**

**11. MARK 1 v 35-39:** Jesus understood perfectly that in order to keep on giving out in teaching, acts of compassion, healing miracles, then He needed time with His Father to receive His strength. Jesus knew that He could not live without prayer. It was essential that if He was to meet people, He must first meet God. Understanding, then that for Jesus prayer was His vital breath and He the Son of God, one of the Trinity, co-equal with God, how much more that our prayer life be sustained and enlarged in order that we might grow as Christians and be able to meet others in their need!

The very first part of the period of Jesus' ministry was extremely busy and there was never an opportunity for Him to be alone. He had, firstly, the disciples and their needs and questions and His responsibility to them and then there were the crowds of people, always seeking Him out.

An important thing to recognise in the Gospels is that Jesus' desire to spend time alone always coincided with a move forward in His ministry. This time it was when He chose that the time was right to spread His ministry geographically: He went to many synagogues (wherever there were twelve Jewish males without a synagogue a new one could be built) and preached the Good News-remember this was exciting tidings-and we are told here that He cast out demons. Spiritually, this period of time when Jesus had just begun His ministry was dark and many were spiritually afflicted. We don't know if the demons were more present and active because Jesus was bringing light into the darkness or that things had been this way for many years. You may have experienced a home or an area that is spiritually dark and oppressed, some have told me that it can be whole countries which have this oppressive feel, Cornwall had its strangeness!

What does this teach us this morning?

1. Sometimes we may have to get up very early in order to have time with God in the quiet. If you awake very early then consider whether it is the Spirit prompting you to prayer.

2. Jesus was human. He needed to restore His strength.

3. Jesus is God. He cast out demons with divine authority!

4. Our mission is to be in word and in deed. Principally and firstly, it must be in deed!

**12. MARK 1 v 40-45:** This is a beautifully little story of one of those who was healed by Jesus. Mark recognises the importance that the healing miracles of Jesus not only be seen as bringing new life to masses of the sick, but of individual lives being turned around. This concerns the healing of a man with leprosy. There were different forms of leprosy, but they were all horrific, destroying a person's appearance and then their voice, hands and feet, ending in death after around nine years. Someone suffering with this disease was banished from the fellowship of others and wherever they went they had to cry out a warning: ''Unclean!'' They were considered dead people walking.

A couple of things to note especially here...

1. The leper stated...''If you are willing...''. He had faith that Jesus could take away his disease, but it depended on His willingness! It may be that the sufferer with leprosy had felt, after long years of rejection, that no one not even Jesus could view him as a human being and perceive the person he once was. So many people around us have had their personality and appearance wrecked, sometimes through self-abuse, most of the time through life circumstances. They are no longer able to see themselves as fully human, but God still loves them and views them as made in His image.

2. Jesus allowed the leper to approach Him and then He reached out and touched him! Leprosy was considered to be highly infectious and the thought of catching it filled people with fear. Jesus particularly focussed on it and the healing of it: in the Gospel of Matthew 10 v 8, Jesus commissions the Twelve as they journey out at His command: ''Heal the sick, cleanse lepers.'' Leprosy has parallels in terms of the fear it engendered to AIDS sufferers in the 1980's and 90's. You may recall that Princess Diana visited those with AIDS, dying in hospitals, and reached out to hold their hands, causing shock, but also a changed attitude to the victims.

Jesus had time, He had power, He had compassion. We are called to follow in His footsteps...

**13. MARK 2 v 1-5:** When we read about Jesus and His character, we read and find more about God for He is the exact representation of the Father God-Colossians 1 v 15. Here we are shown that God is inclusive, rather than exclusive; that is to say that He will do whatever is possible to do to bring people to Himself and to heal body, mind and soul. It isn't as if there is this very tight opening, where, if we fulfil all the different criteria we may get to experience His presence: no! He has made it as simple as possible, so that even a child can know Him!

This is a beautiful and well-known story: Jesus returns to His home town and stays in some kind person's home. The news spread that He was there and, before long, the house had filled to capacity with people wanting to see Him. At this time, the door of the house would be opened early in the morning and would remain open all day, so that anyone could go in or out. Into this crowd, which would by then have been flowing out onto the street, came four men carrying their paralysed friend on a stretcher. They couldn't get through the crowd, so they decided to go up on the flat roof, which would have had an outside staircase ascending to it. The roof of the house consisted of flat beams laid across from wall to wall around one metre apart and the spaces filled with brushwood packed tight with clay and the top made watertight. They dug out the material pushed in between the beams without greatly damaging the house and passed the man down to the feet of Jesus.

 Now, the first thing Jesus says to the man is: ''Your sins are forgiven'', rather a strange thing to say when the man clearly needed to be physically healed. However, the Jews connected sin and suffering completely; in fact the Rabbis would state: ''There is no sick man healed of his sickness until all his sins have been forgiven him''. For a person to be sick, God had to be angry with him, the Jews had surmised, and the suffering invalid would have known that too- a type of vicious circle. Jesus declared to him that God was not angry with him, that the pathway to knowing God was open to all and that it was He, Jesus, the man-God, who was calling him to Himself!

**14. MARK 2 v 6-12:** We are continuing to study the healing of the paralysed man, who was brought to Jesus through the roof of a house by his four friends. Before the conversation highlighted here, people had seen Jesus as a local wonder worker: sensational, charismatic, but no more than just another healer, and there were many in Jesus' day.

So, we have seen that Jesus attracted the crowds and, inevitably, He has attracted the notice of the official religious leaders of the Jews. They were guardians of Jewish orthodoxy and so were authorised to deal with anyone who was a false prophet. The shock for those observers came when Jesus told the man that his sins were forgiven. Judaism categorically believed that only God could forgive sins and from the lips of any other it was blasphemy and the penalty was death. Even more shocking was that Jesus demonstrated that this man's sins had been forgiven by commanding him to get up and walk home, which he immediately did! Remember that Jews believed that sin and sickness were indissolubly linked: their theological understanding brought them to the point of either accepting that Jesus was God or that their eyes had fooled them and many other onlookers!

Men of power do not like to be baffled in public like this and through this incident Jesus' death warrant was signed, and He knew it.

Well, what is going on here at the deeper level? Hallelujah that a man has been healed, but what else can we learn from this miracle? Remember that the whole of Jesus' life clearly displayed the attitude of God to men, women and children and that was the very opposite of the way God's attitude had been perceived. The attitude of Jesus was one of perfect love and eager to forgive and He brought God's forgiveness to the world. Jesus could say: ''I forgive'', because in Him God was saying, ''I forgive''. Jesus said in another Gospel: ''I and my Father are one.''

**15. MARK 2 v 13, 14:** This is a passage focussed on the calling of Matthew, the writer of what to the modern reader is the first Gospel; but we also learn about the situation with Jesus. He is now preaching in the open air, as the doors of the synagogues have been shut in His face: the Jewish religious leaders have declared war and that is the first step along a road which leads to crucifixion. Just like John Wesley many centuries later, Jesus is forced to preach in the field and by the sea and so passers by and bystanders have an opportunity to hear Him. One such person may well have been Matthew. He was a tax collector, but unlike Zacchaeus (who collected for the Romans), he was a collector of Herod's taxes. Everyone hated tax collectors whoever they were collecting for. It was a job which they had to bid to get, the highest bidder won the post. The way to retrieve their investment was to charge more than they needed and so they were wealthy individuals, but did not have friends!

When Jesus called Matthew, he gave up everything to follow Him. We read in John's Gospel chapter 21 that, when Jesus died, the disciples who were fishermen went back to their fishing, that was easily done. There was no going back for Matthew, even if he had ever wanted to! However, he gained an ability to look at the world in the face again; he received a far bigger job than he had left behind-one which would consume him for the rest of his life and it brought him immortal and worldwide fame through the writing of his Gospel, a work of genius!

This story also tells us something about Jesus, who even when He was going for a stroll by the lake, was looking for opportunities. Some of my time with people is arranged and booked as you know, whereas there are times when I meet with someone in the street who I've wanted to speak to and it feels timely and less worrying for the other person! Jesus looked for men and women for His kingdom as He walked.