

Reading: Mark 1:29-39

In the morning while it was still dark, Jesus got up, went to a deserted place, and prayed.

It's really important to get our bearings.

Listen to this actual radio encounter on the high seas:

Canadians: Please divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision.

Americans: Recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the north to avoid a collision.

Canadians: Negative. You will have to divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision.

Americans: This is the captain of a U.S. naval ship. I say again, divert your course.

Canadians: No. I say again, you divert your course.

Americans: This is the aircraft carrier USS Lincoln, the second largest ship in the United States Atlantic fleet. We are accompanied by three destroyers, three cruisers, and numerous support vessels. I say again, that's one-five degrees north, or countermeasures will be undertaken to ensure the safety of this ship.

Canadians: This is a lighthouse. Your call!

It's really important to get our bearings. It is important to know where we are, but even more important is to know where we are heading in life.

In our Gospel we see Jesus is getting his bearings. He does it the best way he knows how, he prays. Verse 35: *In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went to a deserted place and there he prayed.* What happens next is really interesting. Simon and Jesus' other companions are hunting for him. You see, the day before, the whole city was looking for him to cure them and teach them. A very anxious Simon said, "Everyone is searching for you!" Now a lesser person would give in to the demands of a whole city. They would return with a wonderful sense of being needed. We all need to be needed right? We would think, "I have become a celebrity, maybe I could sign a few autographs while I'm there." "Of course," we would say, "I will go back and heal everyone." But, having prayed, Jesus has a new sense of direction. He has been reminded through his talking with his Father of the focus of his mission. So, 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 to do." And he goes on to Galilee. Like a compass, prayer has directed Jesus to his true north.

I wonder how you find direction in life. Maybe by talking with friends, maybe by doing what the boss says. Maybe you just respond to demands from family. I think, when we are honest, most of us just drift along trying to keep out of trouble, taking the path of least resistance.

The bishop has made this year a year of prayer. Following a motion from a young man at synod last year, the call to prayer has taken on a whole new dimension. The whole Diocese

from South Westland in the west, across Canterbury and over to the Chatham Islands, have dedicated ourselves to regeneration. Finding myself on a committee, they asked me to write a prayer for the whole church. It goes like this.

Prayer for the regeneration of our Diocese

As the kotuku gently rests upon the tree,
come Holy Spirit and rest upon us
as we pray for the regeneration of our Diocese.

(Silence)

*Ever living God,
through your Spirit you constantly renew the whole creation;
bring regeneration to your Diocese of Christchurch,
grant us courage to grow disciples of Jesus,
give us vision to reach young people and their families,
and strengthen us to create vibrant communities of faith.
All this we ask in Jesus' name.
Amen.*

This prayer will be prayed all this year, and it highlights the three aspects of regeneration: growing as disciples, vibrant communities, families, and young people. I have used the white heron, the kotuku, as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. For Māori the kotuku symbolises the link between heaven and earth and the *Wairua Tapu* or Holy Spirit. We have the only breeding sanctuary in our diocese. Also note that it's both our and God's diocese. We are in partnership with God.

There is to be a Prayer Pilgrimage on the weekend of the first of March and a Vigil of 40 hours of prayer for the 40 days of Lent.

Like Jesus we recognise that we can't do it on our own. We will soon get distracted and miss the mark. But like Jesus, when we pray as a diocese, then like a compass we will be drawn to what God would have us do. In prayer we find direction, encouragement, and strength for our lives.

But all this talk of prayer begs the question. Do we pray? Do you pray? Do we each have a dedicated time of prayer each day when, like Jesus, we draw apart from others and seek the will of God in our lives?

The couple came to the counselor. "How can I help you today?" the counselor opened with. Susan was quick to answer, "We feel like we are drifting apart as a couple." Sam nodded. "Tell me about it." Susan began. "We have been married for 5 years and, well, we don't seem to have anything in common anymore." Sam nodded. "It's like we are ships passing in the night." "I see," said the counselor. "When do you spend quality time together?" the counselor asked. "That's just it," said Sam, "we don't." "Oh," said the counselor pushing a bit harder, "Do you spend time talking, do you have a date night?"

“We don’t” “When was last time you talked?” “Oh, we don’t have time for that, you know, with the kids and the business and all?” “So, you don’t ever talk, you never go on dates, you never spend time together and you think you might be drifting apart?”

We can see in the marriage of Susan and Sam what we often fail to see in our lives with God. We see that when we don’t spend time talking with God in prayer, when we don’t allow ourselves to just be in God’s presence, when we allow the busyness of life to push quality time with God out of our lives it is little wonder that we don’t feel connected to God. It is little wonder we aren’t finding meaning, purpose and encouragement in our lives.

My hope in this year of prayer is that we will all find a way to pray each day. I would love to help you if you find it hard. Maybe that could be a goal for us for Lent. For it’s in our relationship with Jesus that we find direction and purpose and can avoid the lighthouses.

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