

Old Testament: Isaiah 40: 27 - 29

New Testament: Mark 1: 29 - 39

Please pray with me. And now Lord God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

I offer this observation to you that there is a difference between routines and schedules. Schedules are the things that keep our lives organized. Regardless of age or retirement status, we need schedules to help us get all the things done that we need to get done. Especially for parents with kids in high school and middle school and their myriad of activities. Schedules also help us take breaks from all the doing and even, dare I say it, have a little bit of fun once in a while. While it feels counter-intuitive to schedule fun, if it wasn't scheduled we wouldn't have all the golf season activities, bowling leagues, tennis leagues and pickleball tournaments that so many of y'all participate in. Your fun is scheduled and that's OK.

Because a schedule is not the same as a routine. Routines are activities that become almost mechanized. They become automatic to the point that you do them almost without even thinking at all. Don't get me wrong, there is a proper place for this kind of automatic or mechanized functioning. I don't have to consciously work on breathing; I can, but I don't have to. I just do it. I don't have to consciously work on digesting my food after I've eaten it and extracting all the nutrition from it as it breaks down and discarding the leftovers that are not beneficial to me. Some routines are very helpful. But what if we let our relationship become routine? See, that's where we run into danger. So many of us end up taking the relationships we have for granted that we end up missing the import of the persons with whom we have those relationships. Interactions between people are in grave danger when they become automatic or mechanized because relationships are not machines, but living, breathing, emotional things. If you try to make relationships and interactions routine, you're going to run into problems. You can schedule coffee or lunch or dinner, that's necessary, but don't let the interactions during said scheduled relationship times be automatic or routine. When it comes to interpersonal relationships, routines are not necessarily our friends.

Rhythms, on the other hand, I propose to you are quite beneficial. Rhythms allow for separate, disparate entities to flow seamlessly together. They retain their individuality, their uniqueness while simultaneously almost becoming one in their movements. There are myriad examples of this. Sports teams will "get into a rhythm". Dancers, musicians be they bands or orchestras or even our own Joy Ringers find a rhythm and it is beautiful to behold. Here in Mark, Jesus gets into rhythm with God the Father

and God the Spirit. How? Before he left the synagogue in verse 29, he was in the synagogue. Jesus was at church with fellow believers giving praise and worship to the Living God. The first step to being in rhythm with God is worshiping God with others. Second step into rhythm is doing the work of God's kingdom. Verses 31 - 34 outline what this kingdom work is; healing and casting out demons. In God's kingdom, there is no frailty nor vulnerability and there are certainly no demons. Doing kingdom work in rhythm with God means working to heal and cast out even now. The third step then is identified in verse 35. Jesus prayed. He took a break from worship and work to commune directly with God. To interact with God. To seek and discern God's will as is each one of us called upon to do as well. Getting in rhythm with God is worship, kingdom work and prayer.

So then the question becomes what do those three look like in our current day context. Worship is pretty self-explanatory. Y'all are here now. But I encourage you not to forget that worship of the Living God can take many different shapes and forms. We worship God with music. Our chancel choir will continue performing, our Joy Ringers will continue performing, Holy and Jeannie will continue to learn the organ. But do not neglect the value or worth of praise music in favor of choral and traditional music. All music, whatever the style, has the potential and the capacity to be a means by which we worship God. Do not neglect Bible study at home. Yes here you get a weekly dose of hearing work through a thought or idea or even sometimes a passage with a fine tooth comb but that should not inhibit you from doing your own study work at home on a daily basis. Schedule it in as part of your day; put it on your calendar. 15 minutes to read the Bible or do a study is a great place to start.

Kingdom work of healing and casting out demons is not as difficult to relate to today as it appears at first glance. Healing is not just something that happens physically, but spiritually and emotionally too. Medicine has taken the lead on physical healing which means that there is still room for us to pick up the slack on spiritual and emotional healing. Perhaps, we have to start with ourselves. So many of us have been spiritually and emotionally wounded throughout our lives and it impedes from recognizing and living into our fullest potential; our true selves. I hear so many of you talk negatively about yourselves specifically as regards these types or spiritual and emotional matters. You all are far more capable than you give yourselves credit for! Emotional and spiritual healing is possible and available to you even now. I am happy to help you get started and even happier to refer you on to some very excellent therapists popping up all over town who can help who work through this spiritual and emotional healing. As far as casting out demons goes, let's envision demons more generally as those powers and principalities, as the apostle Paul calls them, opposed to the will and rule of God. There are lots of powers and principalities in the world today opposed to God. Those things which seek to divide and separate us; fear-mongering; refusal to take

responsibility for one's own actions leading to scapegoating; gossip; slander. All of these powers and principalities can be fought against and actively resisted and in doing so, we would find ourselves doing kingdom work and in rhythm with God.

Prayer need not be as intimidating as it seems to be to so many. If you feel uncomfortable extemporaneously praying to God or if you feel like you don't know what to pray, start with the Lord's Prayer. You've got that memorized. That's a great way to start every day and stay in rhythm with God. If you want to really get adventurous, try a breathing prayer. on the inhale, "Lord Jesus Christ". On the exhale, "Have mercy on me". And repeat this 3 - 5 times. This is another great way to not only get in rhythm with God through prayer, but to get your whole body in rhythm as you transition your breathing from automatic or mechanized to intentional and rhythmic. And there are numerous little mantras that you can use depending on the situation. About to take a big test? Trying a breathing prayer with 3 calming breaths and on the inhale "Lord Jesus Christ", on the exhale "Calm my troubled heart".

We succeed together when we are in rhythm. So, let's go forth from this place ready, willing and able to seek to be in rhythm with God and with one another. The entire community of Lexington will benefit from everyone in the First Presbyterian Church doing so. Amen.