

**HOUSE OF PRAYER**  
Randall Tremba  
February 8, 2009  
5th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

**Mark 1:29-39**

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

\* \* \*

From a collection of prayers by children: Dear God, please send Dennis Clark to a different camp this year.

Dear God, if we come back as something, please don't let me be Jennifer Horton because I hate her.

Dear God, please make Cleveland the capital of Ohio so I'll get that question right on the test I took this morning in school.

Dear God, please let our team win.

Come to think of it, those prayers aren't a whole lot different than the ones adults sometimes pray. Dear God, may I please have another liver. I messed up the first one you gave me.

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

This is a sermon about prayer but it begins in the closet where a lot of homosexuals pray with sweat dripping like blood from their foreheads. Many of us, homosexual or not, get stuck in closets of fear. Prayer is one way out.

As we know, it's especially terrifying for a homosexual to "come out." Many have and many have paid a high price. Many have been scorned. Many have been beaten, tortured, and killed. Many have killed themselves. You will hear a few such stories this evening in the film, *For the Bible Tells Me So*.<sup>\*</sup> You will also see redemption, grace and great celebration!

A few years ago a youth in this parish referred her homosexual friend to me because her friend's church loudly and persistently condemned homosexuals and homosexuality in Sunday School classes and from the pulpit. *The Bible says, it is an abomination unto the Lord. The Bible says, it's a sin and those who practice it are condemned to hell!*

*Jesus hates me this I know for the Bible tells me so.*

The young man talked and talked and talked. I listened, listened and listened, shivered, and offered the gospel that means so much to us here. *There is nothing you can do to make God love you more; and nothing you can do to make God love you less. God loves you just as you are. It says so in the Bible,* I told the young man. But if you can't hear it there, please hear it from me. *You are dearly, dearly loved by God!*

In his Second Inaugural Address Abraham Lincoln declared: North and South read the *same* Bible. That was then—the 19th century. And now just as then sincere Christians read the same Bible and come to radically different conclusions.

Apparently, Biblical arguments alone will not resolve this issue. The *written* Word may be *necessary* in our tradition but it is not *sufficient*. Never has been. We must heed the *Living* Word as well. We must heed the Living Word and pray, pray, pray.

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

It's a small point to note perhaps, but an important point nonetheless: it was dark—too dark to read the Bible.

*Jesus prayed.*

Why did Jesus pray? I'm guessing it was a habit and I'm guessing he was at that moment facing a crisis, something Scripture alone could not answer: *What in the world am I to do and be?*

It's our question, too, if we shut up and slow down long enough to let it be heard. Every church must ask it. *What in the world are we to do and be* Every soul must ask it. Again and again. *What in the world am I to do and be.* Heterosexuals, homosexuals and everyone in between must ask: *What in the world am I to do and be?*

Jesus prayed. Why not? It's a way of learning and knowing.

As it turns out, prayer is many things but it is more or less just this: *a way of self-discovery.* And you can't discover your true self without discovering God and vice versa.

*In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus went out to a deserted place and prayed. Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you. They want you to heal them now!" Jesus answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."*

Which is to say: it wasn't clear yesterday. But it's clear now. I now know: this is what I came out to do!

Prayer is a way of self-discovery. It opens our hearts to the One in whom we live and move and have our being. Prayer can include words but more often than not it's just listening. Prayer might be a discrete moment in time but more often than not it's a way of life.

Prayer is asking. Prayer is thanking. Prayer is crying. Prayer is singing. Prayer is breathing. Prayer is breathless. Prayer is exclamation. WOW! Look at that! Prayer is protest. Prayer is lament. Prayer is confessing. I'm confessing that I messed up. I'm confessing that I'm scared.

We discover what we are meant to do and be in and through prayer—in word, in silence, in play, in work, day in, day out, in the darkness, in the light, with companions and alone, year after year after year, we pray: *Holy Spirit come. Make me fully alive. Open my eyes, open my ears, open my mouth, open my heart, open my hands that I may live fully in true communion with God and in true community with others day by day by day.*

\*Movie tag: Can the love between two people ever be an abomination? Is the chasm separating gays and lesbians and Christianity too wide to cross? Is the Bible an excuse to hate? More information at [www.forthetellmeso.org](http://www.forthetellmeso.org)