

Reflection on Mark 1:29–39
Rev. Christine Gilbert, for St. Andrew's by the Sea Uniting Church

The agapanthus in the centre of our worship space come from the garden outside the window of my study at home. For weeks I've been watching them change—first green shoots and leaves... then the round heads of flowers... these opened into purple tubes whose nectar drew bees and noisy miners... eventually the purple gave way to green seeds which the wind and rain are now slowly stripping off leaving behind a pincushion remnant to dry in the sun.

Every stage has its own texture, colour and beauty and each stage created a unique picture and mood in the scene outside my window.

Spirituality is embedded in the fulness of this journey as we, too, move from seed, to flower, to seeding and beyond and back again. Spirituality is the work of listening, reflecting, responding and meaning making that gives shape to how we live. It is the formation that happens through daily experiences and encounters, *the conscious participation in our unfolding, becoming and responding.*

The Gospels bear witness to this journey of becoming for Jesus. Today's reading reveals how he moved from place to place, allowing each setting and encounter to impact and shape him. Mark's Gospel may be sparse in detail but it is packed with action, and so, in just these ten brief verses, Jesus

- lifted Simon's mother-in-law by the hand and healed her
- received her loving service
- attended to those who came to the door for healing
- slipped away in the wee hours of the morning to pray
- was approached by the disciples who informed him of the crowd at home
- chose to travel to the next town in order to proclaim the good news there—for that is what he came to do

In his book *Fully Human and Fully Divine*, Michael Casey reflects on Jesus' mobility and how it formed him as a person. In a chapter titled "Jesus moves around" he makes the point that "Gospel spirituality was not thought out logically in a static situation but evolved through interaction with a variety of people and situations."

In other words, Jesus did not embody nor encourage set-and-forget truths and faith to be shored up and untouched by life's impressions and revelations. No, as Jesus travelled and interacted with his environment, his heart and mind were affected, he and his work were shaped and refined.

It is quite remarkable, I think, to imagine Jesus being impacted by people like us. But, then, why wouldn't he be? Jesus was human after all and ideally, to be human, is to be moved and changed by the world around us.

The constant comings and goings of Jesus are woven into the Gospel message itself. In Jesus' life and teachings we hear: don't settle down or settle in too much; keep yourself light and unencumbered, ready to respond and move with the Spirit who is always opening the kingdom of God before you.

Michael Casey acknowledges that holding things lightly and being open to affect brings a certain amount of ambiguity that requires courage and trust. Friends, is this not among the many lessons we are learning at this pandemic time?

Engaging a spirituality that is life-giving is much like crossing a river using stepping stones, we cannot land anywhere for too long or we risk losing our balance. Instead, we must hop confidently from stepping stone to stepping stone, secure in the ultimate destination which is love.

Michael Casey says it this way:

“[E]xternal instability is essential for us if we are to continue growing because it exposes us to new elements that we can integrate with our current resources to arrive at a fuller synthesis which enables us better to deal with reality. We may yearn to always be the same, but this is a delusion. We are elements of a changing universe; from it we draw sustenance and being; from it is derived the challenge to ongoing renewal, just as the skin which forms our interface with the external world is constantly flaking off and being replaced. This is not to say we allow ourselves to be blown around like fallen leaves in a gale, but we need to remind ourselves that steering a straight course demands much vigilance. We have to read the situations through which we pass and constantly make adjustments so that we continue moving in the desired direction.”