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“Jesus was preaching in the synagogues of Judea” (Luke 4:44).

Jesus’ public ministry begins with a burst of energy and signs of power in the lake region of Galilee. He calls his disciples, begins preaching and working miracles and exorcisms in the towns around Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Luke gives his readers a feel for the initial success Jesus experienced. Not only could he heal and drive out demons, his proclamation that the Kingdom of God was at hand seemed to reach deep into the spiritual realms to break the spell of evil and bondage that had reigned up until then.

Jesus enters the house of Peter and immediately heals his mother-in-law of a fever. She rises from her sick bed and begins to serve, also a sign of the Kingdom, where God's love sets in motion human love and service. People pour in from the surrounding towns carrying their sick and possessed family members. As the sun sets and night approaches, Jesus ministers to everyone who comes.

Luke then gives us a glimpse of Jesus' own needs. He is up early and seeking prayer time in the wilderness. The exhilaration of the previous day may have stunned even him, and Jesus needs to commune with his Father. Soon the crowds find him and try to claim him as their local healer, but Jesus is eager to move on to the other towns. His primary mission is not miracles and expelling demons but to preach the Kingdom.

Luke's narrative captures the stages of Jesus' ministry, beginning with great enthusiasm and success, then slowing to a more deliberate and long term strategy as the novelty gave way to increasing opposition from official leaders and crowds who only wanted miracles but did not understand the message or the demands of discipleship. Even Jesus' own disciples needed time out to reflect on what was happening and what was to come.

Our own formation as disciples also goes through stages, from spiritual highs to routine and the need for discipline and deeper understanding of the message and its implications in our lives. The Word of God takes root through study and prayer. Lives of simple service unfold only with trial and error and patience. Christian maturity evolves with experience and our own share of suffering and loss as our faith is tested.

The first disciples went from the rush of success in Capernaum to the hardships and resistance of Judea, and finally to the crushing mystery of Jesus' death in Jerusalem before they were ready to be Apostles sent to proclaim the Gospel. We are called to make the same journey, whether it comes swiftly through crisis or day by day through ordinary practice and fidelity. If we are called to begin, we will receive every grace we need to finish. Jesus, who keeps every promise, knows us by name.

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