

M.I.A.
Mark 1: 14-39

If you are stuck in Ohio dreaming of warmer weather, you might be thinking the initials in the title of the message this morning stand for Miami International Airport. Keep dreaming, as it will probably be at least 5 months before we are complaining that it is too hot outside. If you think MIA refers to the Grammy nominated pop singer, you would also be wrong as I didn't know until very recently that such a person even existed. MIA could stand for the Marble Institute of America or the Masonry Institute of America or the Minneapolis Institute of Art but as far as I can tell none of those fine institutions have anything to do with this morning's Gospel lesson.

Those of you with a military background would immediately recognize those initials to mean missing in action. When I see or hear the initials MIA, I typically think of that black flag that represents soldiers who don't return home from their tour of duty. They are unaccounted for, and because their bodies have not been recovered or sent home, friends and family members don't know for sure whether their loved one is dead or still alive somewhere captured as a POW. They cling to a shred of hope that someday they will be reunited with them, or at least learn the truth about why they never made it home. Perhaps the only thing worse than losing a loved one to war, is losing someone in war.

If we look carefully at the Scriptures, we will see that MIA is also a fitting description for something Jesus did quite often. The first time He went missing in action was immediately after He was baptized. Verses 12 & 13 in this chapter reveal that the Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. We don't know for certain where that wilderness place was, but what we do know is that Jesus was literally missing in action for forty days and forty nights. The missing part is not nearly as important as the action part. The gospels of Matthew and Luke provide additional insight as to some of things that transpired during those 40 days. Both agree that Jesus prayed, fasted, and relied on Scripture to allow Him to overcome each temptation that Satan offered. Going MIA was one of His holy habits.

In the passage that we looked at earlier, we see that Jesus did that very thing. Jesus began His Sabbath day teaching in the synagogue, and by all accounts He was very well prepared as everyone there was astonished by the authority in which He taught. Next, He went on to rebuke a demon from a man at the synagogue. If you or I tried that we would be knocked flat on our backs. He didn't stop there, as they went back to Peter's house for lunch and instead of a nice meal, He found Peter's mother-in-law deathly ill and unable to get out of bed. Jesus healed her, and later that evening found "the whole city" at His door. He healed many of their diseases and cast out many demons.

We can only imagine how worn out He was. He deserved a break and a good night's sleep, but instead of sleeping in, the Bible says Jesus arose a long while before daylight, found a solitary place and there He prayed. He went MIA- missing in action again. No one knew where He was except for God the Father. The Bible doesn't tell us what He prayed for. Maybe it was for the multitudes of sick and demon possessed people He encountered everywhere He went. Maybe it was for faith and the strength to continue His journey to the cross. Maybe it was for Simon and Andrew and James and John and the rest of those folks who chose to become His followers. Maybe it was for you and me to overcome the temptations that will hinder us on our own journey of faith. I suspect it was all of those and more.

That is a good thing, for Satan didn't give up after he lost his battle in the wilderness with Jesus. His attacks shifted to those who claim to follow Jesus, people like you and me. That means there will be times in our lives when **Satan will tempt us to compromise our faith.** He doesn't do that by shouting or even whispering in our ear. He is much too sly for that. What he does do is tempt us with spiritual laziness, and it is easy to give in. It is hard to pray without interruption, especially when our stomach is growling. It is so much easier to pick up our phone or tablet and catch up on the latest bad news than it is to pick up our Bibles and take in the Good News. We are more comfortable talking about political and social causes of the day than we are changing hearts by leading the lost to Christ. Praying, fasting and Bible study rarely come easy, and we will have to work at them if we expect life-changing results.

Much like water seeping past a crack in a dam, we tend to seek the path of least resistance. **Spiritual laziness is seeking easy ways out of difficult situations.** It is failing to consider that God may be using them to perfect us in our faith. The writer of Hebrews 12:3 reminds us to look to Jesus in difficult times so that we don't become "weary and discouraged in our souls", in other words become spiritually lazy and weak and buy into lies and deceit. One of those lies is that we can choose to be whoever we want to be. The truth is that all of us are imperfect beings, in need of holy chastening and correction to make us perfect.

Spiritual laziness is allowing self-satisfaction, comfort, and worldly desires to come ahead of the word of God. It is an enticing trap that is as old as evil itself. History shows that the attractive benefits that it brings are only temporary. Heartache, pain, and countless other after-effects of sin will eventually come with severe consequences. Hebrews 12:14-pursue holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.

Spiritual laziness harms our soul. When we are tempted to go there, we will need to do what Jesus did and go MIA instead. Go missing from the world, go missing from the things that are tempting us there, and then take action to overcome them. Shut out the attractions and distractions of the day that come between us and God and then go into action with God through prayer. It is a powerfully holy habit. Throughout His earthly journey, Jesus went missing in action quite often. Aren't you glad He did? If He took the easy way out, we would not be gathered here this morning to worship Him as our Savior, the One who rose from the dead to rescue us from our sins.

The next morning Simon and his friends went looking for Jesus. Perhaps they were worried about him, or maybe they wanted to see what Jesus would do to top the events of the day before. They told Jesus that "everyone is looking for you". Not everyone was cured of their infirmities that day. There were others in need that Jesus didn't get to. But rather than go back, Jesus told them they must move on. Look at verse 38 with me. Jesus primary purpose for coming to earth was to preach the Gospel. Healing and casting out demons were an added benefit, something He did to validate and prove He was the Son of God.

It is a difficult truth, but Jesus doesn't heal all of us of our physical infirmities. What He does do is offer the truth of the Gospel and a promise of salvation to those who believe it and follow Him. He offers to cure us of spiritual laziness and heal us of our spiritual infirmities. Jesus is the God of grace and the God of new opportunities, and it is never too soon or late to make the choice to follow Him. You may not have realized it, but the first time Jesus extended an invitation to Simon and Andrew to become His disciples they didn't completely commit. They followed Him for a while and then went back to what they knew-fishing. They took the path of least resistance. Did they give in to their fear of failure? Were they afraid to trust Jesus to provide for their needs? Were they afraid that they might wind up losing their lives like John the Baptist? Whatever their reasons were, both returned to their old routines and were fishing one day in Galilee when Jesus sought them out again. The second time around, things were different. Verse 18 tells us that they immediately left their nets for good and followed Him. They left their fears behind and began a new life with Jesus Christ. They were missing in action! Let us pray for grace and power to do the same. Amen