

Lining up with God's Will
Mark 1:29-39
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It is only the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark, but already Jesus is performing miracles — and dealing with the crowds who are clamoring for more miracles — and dealing with disciples who do not understand his ministry. Already he is withdrawing to a deserted place for prayer. Already he finds himself having to re-set the focus where it belongs —the proclamation of the message (v. 38). This is the shortest of the four Gospels, the fastest paced, and the one characterized by the word, immediately! We find ourselves needing to replay the story in slow motion to understand its significance.

Jesus was beginning his public ministry. He called four disciples—Peter and Andrew—James and John—and they followed him. They had been fishing in the Sea of Galilee. Peter and Andrew had been casting nets, as they had done for all of their adult lives, when Jesus said, "**Follow me and I will make you fish for people**" (v. 17). Then Jesus saw James and John sitting in their boat mending their nets. He called them to follow him, and they got up—left their father Zebedee who was in the boat with the hired hands—and followed Jesus.

That's a familiar enough story that most of us aren't likely to give it a second thought. Jesus called these four men, and they followed him. So what! Big deal!

But it was a big deal! Life in Jesus' day was different from our lives today. Not only did they not have computers and iPhones—they didn't have Social Security and pension plans either. The system that took care of people was based on the family. Parents took care of children when the children were young—and adult children took care of parents when their parents grew old.

At some point in that life-cycle, sons would take over the responsibility for farming the land—or running the fishing boat—or managing the shop. For that system to work, the sons had to remain at home—near their parents. So when Jesus called these two pairs of brothers to follow him, it was a big deal.

Peter, before Jesus changed his name, was known as Simon Bar-Jonah. "Bar" means "son of"—so he was Simon, son of Jonah. Jonah was the father of Peter and Andrew. I wonder how Jonah learned that his sons had left their nets to follow Jesus. Did he go looking for his sons and find the nets lying on the seashore? I hope not. Mark says that Peter and Andrew "**IMMEDIATELY...left their nets and followed (Jesus)**" (v. 18). IMMEDIATELY! But I hope that Jesus gave them time to say goodbye.

What about Zebedee—father of James and John? Zebedee was sitting in his boat with his sons and some hired men. They were mending their nets. Jesus called James and John—and they "**left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed (Jesus)**" (v. 20). I wonder how Zebedee felt about that!

Then Jesus took these four new disciples to Capernaum. Capernaum was a seaside town on the north side of the Sea of Galilee—and it was the home of Peter and Andrew—and Jesus made Capernaum his home as a man (Matthew 4:13). So these four men followed Jesus—but not very far.

When the sabbath came, they went to the synagogue. They would have had one synagogue in Capernaum, and the whole town would have turned out.

So on the sabbath, Jesus took his four brand-new disciples to the synagogue. Jesus was the teacher that day. Jesus really knocked their socks off. As I preached about last week, Jesus taught and preached with authority. The people "were astounded at his teaching, it was not like anything they had ever heard before, certainly not like that of the scribes.(v. 22). When Jesus taught, it wasn't the same old stuff warmed up. Nobody fell asleep that day. They were spiritually hungry, and Jesus fed them.

You might remember that there was a man in the congregation was possessed by a demon.

This man began to shout at Jesus—right in the middle of their synagogue service. He shouted, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God" (v. 24). That was the demon speaking through the man's voice.

Jesus rebuked the demon and said, "**Be silent, and come out of him!**" (v. 25)—"and the unclean spirit, convulsing (the man) and crying with a loud voice, came out of him" (v. 26).

The people were amazed. They said, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" (v. 27). Jesus became famous in Capernaum that day—and his fame began to spread.

After the synagogue service, Peter and Andrew took Jesus to their home. Think about that for a moment. If you had Jesus come home with you after the Sunday service, what would you do?

When Peter and Andrew took Jesus to their home, I am sure their mother wanted to treat Jesus as an honored guest. She wanted to be the perfect hostess—but she couldn't do that, because she was sick. But when someone told Jesus that she was sick, "he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them" (v. 31).

Some women don't like that story, because it puts the woman in the role of a servant. But let's look at it in a different way. Usually when I am sick and unable to do what I love to do—all I really want is to be able to be up and doing what I love. That is what Jesus did for Peter's mother. He took a woman who was sick and made her well. He took a woman who wanted to be "up and around" doing things—and made it possible for her to do that. Jesus transformed that day for Peter's mother—changed embarrassment to blessing. Time after time, the Gospels present women in honored roles—from Mary the mother of Jesus to Mary who was the first to discover the open tomb. This is just one more instance where Jesus does something good for a woman.

The word got around. That evening—when the sabbath was over—people brought all sorts of sick people to Jesus. "The whole city was gathered around the door. And (Jesus) cured many who were sick... and cast out many demons" (vv. 33-34).

In other words, Jesus was on a roll. The people were amazed. They were talking about him. They were crowding around him.

So what did Jesus do? "In the morning, while it was still very dark, (Jesus) got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed" (v. 35). Well, OK! Prayer is good. We certainly can't blame Jesus for taking a little time to pray. I'm sure that his disciples were OK with that too.

But they were not OK with Jesus taking more time than necessary for prayer. They hunted for Jesus and finally found him in that deserted place. They said, "Everyone is searching for you" (v. 37b). Don't you hear the rebuke in that? "Everyone is searching for you." In other words, "What are you doing out here, Jesus? The action's back in town. You're on a roll. People love you. Come on! Let's get back to Capernaum, where the action is!"

But how did Jesus respond? Did he pull himself together so that he could return to Capernaum? No. Did he seem concerned that people couldn't find him? No. Jesus said:

"Let us go on to the neighboring towns,
so that I may proclaim the message there also;
for that is what I came to do" (v. 38).

Jesus did lots of good things, but he also left a good deal of disappointment in his wake:

- I'm sure that Jonah, the father of Peter and Andrew, was disappointed when his sons walked away from their nets.
- I'm sure that Zebedee was disappointed when James and John left his boat.
- I'm sure that the people of Capernaum were disappointed when Jesus didn't return.
- I'm sure Jesus' disciples were disappointed when Jesus didn't rush back to embrace the crowds in Capernaum.

But Jesus had work to do—and not much time to do it. So he said to his disciples:

"Let us go on to the neighboring towns,
so that I may proclaim the message there also;
for that is what I came to do" (v. 38).

To understand Jesus' response, we need to remember that he had been praying in a deserted place. We don't know the content of Jesus' prayers—what he said or what he heard from God. I am confident, though, that when Jesus prayed, he learned more and more of God's will for his life. I am confident that those quiet times with God kept Jesus perfectly in synch with God's will.

God had not sent Jesus to bask in celebrity at Capernaum. God had sent Jesus to proclaim the Good News of salvation throughout Galilee—throughout Israel. So when Jesus' disciples came saying, "Everyone is searching for you," Jesus replied:

"Let us go on to the neighboring towns,

so that I may proclaim the message there also;
for that is what I came to do."

I suspect that the disciples were disappointed that Jesus didn't follow up his initial success in Capernaum. They must have believed that Jesus was missing the main opportunity. But Jesus wasn't missing anything. Jesus was in perfect synch with the God's will—and that's exactly where he wanted and needed to be.

We might take a lesson from that. In our prayers, we often tell God what we want—and that's OK—our loving God wants us to feel free to tell him what is on our hearts. But we must also recognize that our thoughts are not God's thoughts and our ways are not God's ways (Isaiah 55:8).

We would do well to end our prayers as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed, "**Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me**" (Matthew 26:39)—in other words, Jesus was praying that he might be able to avoid the cross. But then Jesus closed his prayer by saying, "**Your will be done**" (Matthew 26:42).

Jesus didn't pray "**Your will be done**" in a spirit of resignation—as if he thought that God didn't want good things for him. Jesus prayed "**Your will be done**" knowing full well that God loved him—and that God's will was the perfect will for Jesus' life. Jesus knew that he could not go wrong by going where God led him—and doing what God wanted him to do.

Jesus taught us to pray that way too, didn't he! He taught us to pray, "**Your kingdom come. YOUR WILL BE DONE, on earth as it is in heaven**" (Matthew 6:10). "**Your will be done.**"

What are we called to do? We can make the effort to do God's will ourselves. We can line ourselves up with God's will through prayer—through reading scripture—through worship—through association with other Christians.

How do we do this? I believe we do it by asking ourselves what would be God's desired outcome—knowing the goodness of God, the love that God has for God's creation and the fact that God made humans in His image, what would be God's desire in this circumstance. After asking that—discern what part of that will am I capable of helping make happen—if any. In other words “what is the “right” Just” and Godly thing to do in what ever circumstance we find ourselves. We can deepen this understanding by increasing our time with God. Dr. Cho, our D.S. and a candidate or Bishop has asked each of us on the Arlington District to enter into prayer for one hour each day. I am attempting this and I invite you to do the same.

When we do that, we will help God's kingdom to come in our little corner of the world. We will get at least a glimpse of the heavenly realm—a peek into eternity.

Let's pray. Let's ally ourselves with the God's will. Let's go where God leads us—and do what God calls us to do. When we do that, we will become a blessing to others—and we will receive blessings from God.