

+ Mark 1:29-39 + Know Where You're Going + 5th Sunday after the Epiphany + 8 February 2009 +

"Do you know where you're going?" Have you ever been asked that question before? It's a question that often pops up after a few wrong turns and some growing tension in the car. It's also a question that's usually asked before you leave for a trip. Most times you know your destination, but you don't always know how to get there. So you get out a map or you ask for directions or go online or even use a GPS. Hopefully, the directions you get will get you to your destination without any wrong turns or side tracks.

The answer to that question, "Do you know where you're going?" is also important to know for your spiritual life. Do you know where you're headed? I hope you all can honestly say—heaven. So how do you get there? That's a question that countless people have asked and wondered about over the years, but God's Word shows us the only way. Last week, we learned from God's Word how to know whom to follow. Based on what he said and did for us, we know for certain we are to follow Jesus and only Jesus. He leads us to heaven, but how does he get us there? Well, this morning, Mark helps you and me to **KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING** and how you'll get there.

It was the very same day we heard about last week—a Sabbath Saturday early in Jesus' ministry. He was just starting to call followers and just starting to gain a reputation. As was his custom, Jesus had attended worship at the synagogue and had been invited to preach as the visiting rabbi or teacher. While he preached, a demon-possessed man had confronted Jesus seeking to ruin his message, but with a stern and clear command, Jesus cast the demon out. The demon obeyed the Son of God and news **"spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee."**

Following the service, it was common practice to attend a special Sabbath meal. So Jesus and his small band of four disciples made their way to the home of the fishermen brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew. It was just a short walk from the synagogue. When Jesus arrived at their home he met the whole family, except for one elderly member—Peter's mother-in-law. She **"was in bed with a fever"**. This fever was keeping her from meeting her Savior, hearing his Word and serving her divine Guest. In a way this fever blocked the way for her to follow Jesus. She needed his help.

So Jesus in his grace opened the way for her. He removed the obstacle that blocked her from following him. **"[Jesus] went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them."** Free of the obstacle blocking the way, Peter's mother-in-law followed Jesus.

That healing is such a beautiful picture, because here you have the King of glory, the Son of God, the promised Messiah taking time from his busy Sabbath to go and heal this sickly woman. Jesus wanted her to follow him, so he opened the way first. Then when the Sabbath ended at sunset, Jesus opened the way for many others in the town. It's remarkable how many obstacles and problems people had to deal with before they could follow Jesus. So many were sick. So many possessed by demons. So many worried about their hurting loved ones. So many despaired of themselves and sought help from Jesus, their compassionate Savior.

"The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was."

Jesus removed the obstacles that confronted those people. He opened the way to follow him, even silencing demons, but why did Jesus take the time for individual after individual into the wee hours of the morning? Jesus wasn't just opening the way for the people of Capernaum, but clearing the way to heaven for all of us—a way which would only be completely clear through Calvary's cross and an empty tomb. Jesus wanted every single soul to be saved. He didn't want Satan and sin to stand in the way of anyone. So Jesus cleared the way so his good news could change hearts and lives.

Jesus opens the way for us too, because we desperately need it. Perhaps a guilty conscience for the foolish sins of your past or the loveless sins of your present blocks your path. Perhaps grief or worry for a loved one leaves an obstacle in the way. Perhaps fears of what the future might hold put up a roadblock. Perhaps worry or uncertainty over your finances or your family or your job or your marriage or your friendships blocks the way. Perhaps sins of weakness hinder your following Jesus. Perhaps a misunderstanding about some teaching of God's Word or a lack of trust in his promises or a subtle denial of what God has to say because it just doesn't make sense still prevents you from following Jesus. Each of us has or had obstacles that hinder us from freely following Jesus. What we need to realize is that like those people of Capernaum, trials and difficulties in this life actually cause us to despair of ourselves and of our own abilities.

We need Christ, our compassionate Savior. We need Jesus to act on our behalf and trials spur us to seek that help. In his grace and mercy, Jesus doesn't look down on any of us, but for every single one of us, he clears away the obstacles for us to follow him. With the truth of his Word, Jesus opens the way for us as we find out how he cleared that path to eternal life by his own perfect life, his own innocent death and his own glorious resurrection.

Jesus clears the obstacle of guilt with his free and priceless forgiveness earned not by us, but for us on the cross of Calvary. Jesus clears those obstacles of grief and worry and uncertainty and fear with his sure and certain promises of life eternal, hope, certainty, and the gift of faith created by his Holy Spirit through the Gospel so we can trust those promises. Jesus clears those roadblocks of weakness and misunderstanding and unbelief by conquering the very forces that hinder us—sin crucified to his cross, Satan crushed in defeat and death destroyed. Jesus overcomes the world and humbles our human reason to stand in awe of his amazing grace.

In doing all this, Jesus opens the way for us to follow him through this earthly life to eternal life. That way we can be absolutely certain about where we're going. Once we know that, it's time go and follow Jesus.

Jesus has opened the way to heaven for us. How are you and I to respond to all this? We have a good example in Peter's mother-in-law. What happened after the fever left her? We're simply told, "***She began to wait on them.***" That's remarkable! Peter's mother-in-law didn't go out and try to spend the rest of her life doing some extraordinary spiritual task. She didn't try to sign a book deal or do the talk show circuit. She didn't position herself as the queen of Capernaum. She didn't even leave the house. She didn't do any of that. She simply followed her Master in faithful service. She wasn't trying to earn Jesus' favor, because she couldn't, but by faith she realized she was saved. So she served in the best way she knew how. Jesus was going to eat the best meal she could provide. Basically, Peter's mother-in-law responded by faithfully and gratefully carrying out her vocation—her God-given role to serve her God by serving her neighbor, who right then was Jesus.

How do you and I usually respond to Jesus' help? Doesn't it often happen that we're grateful and we give thanks when Jesus provides help, but we often limit our response to mere words or thoughts of thanks? We can better respond to Jesus' help when **we follow him with faithful service.**

When Jesus calls us to follow him, he doesn't expect us to carry out some extraordinary spiritual task. No, he calls you and me to carry out our God-given roles of service to our "neighbors". That begs the question—"Who is my neighbor?" My neighbors aren't just the couple who live next door or the family across the street. If you're a parent or grandparent, your child or grandchild is your "neighbor". If you're a spouse, your spouse is your "neighbor". If you're an employee, your fellow employees, your boss and your customers are your "neighbors". If you're a student, your classmates and teacher are your "neighbors". You see what I mean? God has given to each and every one of us roles to serve God through faithful service to our neighbors. Jesus wants us to follow him with faithful and grateful service. That's what Peter's mother-in-law did and that's how we respond.

We don't faithfully serve so we can merit or earn God's favor or even to make up for a single sin. If that were the case, then you might as well pull Christ down from the cross and take your sins back on yourself. No, we do it out of thanksgiving as we're reminded from the familiar words of Psalm 118, "***Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his faithful love endures forever.***" We're motivated by Christ's love for us to live lives of faithful service as Paul wrote, "***For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.***" With that new reality in mind—that Jesus has cleared the way for us to live no longer for ourselves, but out of grateful thanks to him—we now go the way Jesus has opened for us. We now faithfully follow him all the time knowing where we're going—heaven, all the time knowing how we'll get there—only through Christ's blood and merit, all the time faithfully following in grateful service.

So are you sure you know where you're going now? You don't need a map or a GPS to get there. You have Christ. You have his Word. You have Holy Baptism and his Holy Supper. The way is clear and open, and if ever trial or difficulty throw up a roadblock, Christ will clear it for you so you can keep following him. Now go in peace and serve the Lord with gladness! Amen.