

## **“Wherever He Leads, Will You Go?”**

**Mark 1:29-39**

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I had the finest mother-in-law a person could ever want. She was as good to me as my own mother. This is why mother-in-law jokes never appealed to me. None of them described Jackie's mother.

However, if she were alive, I think she would give me permission to tell a couple of mother-in-law jokes this morning. She had a good sense of humor and would understand that you cannot have a biblical story about a mother-in-law and not have a little fun with it.

Do you know why Adam and Eve were so happy in the Garden of Eden? Neither one of them had a mother-in-law.

Do you know who stands behind every successful man? A surprised mother-in-law.

How many mothers-in-law does it take to change a light bulb? It takes only one because she holds the bulb up to the socket and waits for the world to revolve around her.

I may have to answer to my mother-in-law for telling these jokes when I see her in heaven. She will probably ask me why I didn't tell any son-in-law jokes. Come to think of it, I'm not sure I know any.

I doubt that Simon told any mother-in-law jokes, especially on this Sabbath day. His mother-in-law was sick, certainly too sick to go to the synagogue, and he seemed to be very concerned. It was the first thing that he told Jesus when they entered his home after attending worship in the synagogue.

Without saying anything, Jesus went to her bedside and healed her. Immediately she got out of bed and began serving those that came for a visit.

No doubt word about what Jesus did for her spread quickly throughout Capernaum because after sundown, sick people from all over town gathered at Simon's door. Jesus healed many of them, too.

The next morning, Jesus rose before daybreak and found a deserted place to pray. After the sun came up, Simon and the disciples came looking for him. Evidently, the people gathered again at Simon's door hoping Jesus would heal them. Upon finding Jesus, they informed him that everyone was searching for him, implying that he needed to return and pick up where he left off the previous night.

Can you imagine their surprise when Jesus refused to go back? “Let us go on to the neighboring towns so that I may proclaim the message there, also. That is what I came to do.” Mark says that Jesus went to other towns around Galilee doing for the people in those villages what he did for his friends in Capernaum.

What can we take away from this story today? Let me suggest some ideas.

**Hurting people need immediate attention and nothing is more important than helping them.**

Simon's mother-in-law was the second person that Jesus healed that day, which was strictly forbidden on the Sabbath according to Jewish law. Between sundown Friday and sundown Saturday, no work could be done, including helping someone who was sick. At best you could stabilize their condition, but do nothing to improve it. This was why people waited until the sun set to come to Simon's home. They knew the rules.

Jesus did, too, but he suspended them in order to help the demon-possessed man in the synagogue and Simon's mother-in-law. He believed that the Sabbath was made for man, not the other way around. By example, he revealed that any rule that interfered with helping someone needed to be reconsidered and suspended. Helping people was his highest priority and mission. It should be ours, too.

How would you finish this sentence? “I cannot help him because...or until...” While there are valid reasons, most are excuses. They reveal where our priorities really are and what our true mission is. Do yours need adjusting?

Who was the last person that made you feel like you were the most important person in the world because they interrupted their schedule to help you? How did it make you feel? You'll never forget them or what they did, will you? I wonder who needs to feel that way around you.

One of the themes of Mark's gospel is urgency. His use of the word, "immediately" in this story makes it the ninth time he has done so and this is just the first chapter of his gospel. For Mark, there was no time to waste because there was much to do and so little time to do it. People were hurting and needed attention. In Mark's opinion, nothing should interfere with helping them, especially religious rules and ceremonial rituals.

**In this story, I sense that the appropriate response to grace is service that springs from a grateful heart.** What did Simon's mother-in-law do after being healed? "She began to serve them," Mark wrote.

This is why grace is so powerful. It is contagious. It inspires the recipient to be gracious and pass on the favor. One good deed leads to another and another and another. What a difference grace makes when it is passed forward in a home, a school, the marketplace, the church and the world. It truly allows every believer the opportunity to be a minister, as our church theme encourages.

I want you to notice something about the way that Mark relates this story. There is nothing dramatic about it. No trumpets sound or angels sing. Simon's mother-in-law was not paraded before the people and exploited for personal gain. A need was voiced and a kind deed was quietly done. Is there a better definition of ministry?

Ministry is both intentional and spontaneous. There are times when we arrange our schedule to set aside responsibilities to help others, such as a mission trip. On the other hand, there are times when we respond to a need spontaneously. Both are valid forms of ministry that are appropriate responses to the grace-gifts we have received.

What did you do last week on the spur of the moment to help someone? What do you intend to do later this year that requires careful planning? Answering these questions will let you know what kind of minister you are and your own level of gratitude for what others have done for you.

**Helping others, spontaneously or intentionally, will require a lot of praying.** What did Jesus do the morning after attending to so many needs? He rose before daybreak to go to a deserted place to pray. He knew he needed God's help as much as the people needed his. Without it, he could not carry out his divine mission.

Compassion fatigue is real. Helping others is hard work. This is why Leonard Griffith wrote that "every encounter with man must be balanced by an encounter with God." He referred to this as the Pendulum Principle.

So where did Jesus go to achieve this balance? He went to a deserted place where he could get away from distractions and interruptions and be alone with God. They had a lot to talk about as he began his ministry and clarified his call. Pressure and stress were already mounting and he needed God's help to deal with them.

I believe the Quakers were heavily influenced by Jesus' need for solitude. They were known for saying, "The Holy Spirit is shy. Like a wild animal, it will only come out when all is still and quiet."

Where is that place for you, that place of quiet rest? How often do you go there? What difference does it make in your life? What difference does it make when you do not go there?

The fourteenth-century Christian mystic Meister Eckhart said, "Nothing in all of creation is so like God as silence." Commenting on this, Diana Butler Bass has written, "To rediscover silence is to rediscover God."

When you go to your quiet place, let me encourage you to do so with an open heart and mind. I am confident that Jesus did and was open to divine leadership. His quick response to Simon about moving on beyond Capernaum revealed this.

I sense that one reason Jesus rose early to pray was because he was facing a tough choice. He knew that the good people of Capernaum, including his disciples, wanted him to stay there and be their hometown rabbi, and that no doubt was appealing to him.

Capernaum was a safe and affirming place. He could have lived a long life there and would have been loved and accepted. No one there would have ever cried, "Crucify Him!" but only "Hosanna!" How tempting this must have been, but was it what he came to do? Was this God's will for his life and ministry?

I believe he received the answer that morning when he prayed and felt divine leadership to go elsewhere. Others needed to hear his message and feel his healing touch, too, even though this meant taking great risks. Under God's guidance, he had to leave this comfortable and safe place, as difficult as this was for him and them.

"Let us go on to the neighboring towns so that I may proclaim the message there, also. That is what I came to do."

**I think God gets uncomfortable when we get comfortable.** When we decide that we want to stay in nice, friendly, safe Capernaum, this disturbs Him. This is not to say that Capernaum is a bad place. To the contrary, it is a wonderful place and we need Capernaum. Jesus did. He made Capernaum his base of operation. He returned often to rest and find encouragement from dear friends.

However, it was not the only place his voice needed to be heard and his touch needed to be felt. The world awaited him and God reminded him that morning.

**Have you grown too comfortable?** Are you more concerned about building a safe nest than responding to the needs of hurting people? I suspect we all have.

**Where is your Capernaum?** Who needs you to venture outside your cocoon and notice them? Whose pleas for help are you not hearing because you are voicing your own desires so loudly? Whose needs are going unmet because you are unwilling to take risks?

Last Wednesday, the founder of Habitat for Humanity, Millard Fuller, died suddenly of a heart attack. He was seventy-three years old.

He is the one that coined the phrase, "the theology of enough." "We have enough resources," Fuller said on many occasions, "to take care of the world's need, but not its greed."

At age 29, Fuller was a millionaire living the American Dream. He was also losing his family because of misplaced priorities and neglect. After several candid talks with his wife, Linda, Fuller sold what he owned, gave the proceeds to charity and moved to Koinonia Farms, a Christian commune in Americus, Georgia. It was there that he conceived the idea of building homes with no-interest mortgages for the poor. From 1973-1976, Fuller and his family lived in Zaire to develop that program.

In 1976, Fuller returned to Americus and began Habitat for Humanity. Since then, almost 1.5 million no-interest homes have been built all over our country with the aid of volunteers and future occupants of those homes. Even after separating from Habitat in 2005, Fuller continued to build houses for the poor through the Fuller Center for Housing. He pursued this passion until the day he died.

When Fuller arrived in heaven on Wednesday, what do you think the Lord said to him? Do you think it is possible that He whispered in his ear as He gave him a big hug, "Thank you, Millard, for not getting too comfortable?" I do.

Will He say the same thing to you and me? Think about it this week when you go to your quiet place.