

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Joining Jesus...Saved to Serve

Mark 1:29-39

2/4/18

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2 Pt 1:2)

Mark 1:29-31

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I still remember the day after I was ordained. I was fresh out of the Seminary, the previous day I had been ordained and installed at my first congregation. It was great day; my dad came and preached the sermon, there were ten, or so, other pastors who had come. It really was great, it was humbling and a bit scary.

Then the next morning I got up, got ready, and went to my office. I sat down, looked at my computer screen, and thought, "*Now what?*" I really had no idea what to do. It was the first time in my life I didn't have someone else over me telling me what should be done. In every job I had, all fifteen of them, there was always a boss telling me what needed to be done. When I was in school, there were teachers and professors who gave assignments. So, there I was, newly ordained without a clue of what I should be doing. "*Now what?*"

Have you ever had one of those moments? A moment where you weren't sure what to do next? You got to the end of a big project at work, countless hours, months were poured into that project. You took a lot of pride in what you accomplished. But now it's done. "*Now what?*" You just played your last game, not just of the season, but of your life. "*Now what?*" You've finally reached retirement. "*Now what?*" I once worked with a guy who had been a lineman for an electric company for 30-something years. He had recently retired, but his retirement only lasted two weeks. He couldn't handle it. He had to get a new job. He didn't have an answer for "*Now what?*"

Things have a way of defining us like that, don't they? I had been a student for 21 of the 26 years of my life when I finally graduated from the Seminary. All of a sudden I wasn't anymore. Those work projects take up so much of your time, then they don't. You spend decades working, then you retire and you don't anymore. "*Now what?*" can be difficult to figure out.

What about spiritually? This Epiphany season, we've been invited by God to join Jesus. Through this first chapter of Mark we've seen God's grace in your life in that you've been called to follow Jesus...but now what?

Peter's mother didn't have any problem with that. This Gospel lesson comes right after the Gospel we heard last Sunday. We heard about Jesus going to the synagogue in Capernaum one Sabbath day. He was asked by the synagogue leaders if he had a message of encouragement for the people, that was a common practice at the time, and Jesus began to teach. We also heard how Satan tried to stop Jesus' teaching. A man who had been possessed by a demon came in and tried to distract from Jesus. But it didn't work, Jesus cast out the demon and news of him spread even more.

After church that Sabbath Day in the Synagogue, Jesus was invited to Peter's house for dinner. Peter and his brother Andrew, and the brothers James and John, had recently begun following Jesus as

full-time disciples. So those five went to Peter's house, but when they got there the Sabbath meal wasn't ready yet. Peter's wife – yes Peter was married, his wife even went on missionary journeys with Peter after Jesus' ascension – was probably apologetic, maybe a bit flustered and embarrassed that she wasn't ready for her important guests. But she didn't have the help she usually did. Her mother was sick with a fever.

So look what Jesus does, **“he went to her, took her hand and helped her up.”** That Jesus took her hand is really beautiful, isn't it? When you hear someone is sick, you don't want to get too close, do you? You want to keep your distance so you don't catch whatever they have. The flu has been going around recently. When you hear someone has, or even recently had, the flu, you want nothing to do with that, right? But not Jesus. He steps right in to help. He steps right in to heal.

Jesus has done more to help and heal than simply help Peter's mother out of bed, hasn't he? He was not afraid to step right into our mess. He did not hesitate to come to your aid. He stepped in and brought you healing, not just from the flu, not just from some fever. He came to bring you healing from your sin. He came to deliver you from death.

Jesus knew there was no way you were going to save yourself. There was no one else who could do it for you either. You weren't going to find a cure for sin. You weren't going to find a self-help program to get rid of sin. Sin clings to you so tightly that there is no rescue if Jesus did not come.

But he has come for you. He has taken your sin on himself. He has gone to the cross for your sin. He has taken away your sin through Holy Baptism. He has taken you by the hand and lifted you to himself. He has saved you!

No more guilt of sin. No more wondering if you could ever possibly measure up to God. No more fear of what's going to happen next – no more fear of death. You have been saved by Jesus...Now what?

You know, of course, the ultimate and final result of Jesus' saving you from sin. You have heaven! You are able to look forward to perfect joy and fellowship with God in heaven when your life here comes to an end. But that still might be a while, so in the meantime...Now what? What does Jesus' saving you mean for the rest of your life?

Peter's mother-in-law got the point of Jesus' help immediately. She didn't have to stop and think *“Now what?”* She knew she had been saved to serve. That sounds a little strange, doesn't it? Saved to serve. Martin Luther spoke about this very thing in a treatise he wrote in 1520 called *“On the Freedom of a Christian.”* This short, but challenging, work begins with quite the paradoxical statement: *“A Christian is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.”*

So, you are the most free lord of all. You have been set free by Jesus. His life and death in your place has set you free from the guilt and punishment, the curse of your sin. As a result, there is no more “have to” there is no more “should do” in your life. You are free. You are free from the demands of God's Law because Jesus has set you free by keeping God's Law in your place.

At the same time, you are the most dutiful servant of all. Your freedom from sin, from the curse and punishment of death, from the demands of God's Law means using that freedom in joyful and willing service to everyone else. This is true freedom!

Look at the way this played out in Peter's mother-in-law. Jesus saved her. He set her free from that sickness. And what does she do? She pops out of bed and begins to serve others. No one told her to do that. Jesus didn't say, "*Now I've saved you, you really ought to help others.*" No one had to tell her that because she understood the joy of being saved gave her the freedom to use her life in service to others. No one would have blamed her if she wanted to take it easy for a little while. No one would have blamed her if she had gone back to rest up a little bit. No one would have blamed her if she had asked others to help her, to serve her. But she immediately got up to help and to serve in whatever way she could. She rejoiced in Jesus' help and healing and her joy showed in her service.

Now, this is probably where you expect to hear, "*That's what you should do too!*" And it's true that we don't often use our freedom properly. We do, at times, need the reminder not to use our freedom selfishly – to look out for and serve only ourselves.

Think of Jesus in this text. His eyes were always directed out to the needs of others. After healing Peter's mother, that evening, it sounds like the whole town needed Jesus' help! You know how you feel after a long day, you just want to relax. But Jesus' eyes were always on the needs of others. The next morning, Jesus could have stayed in Capernaum and soaked up the fame and attention. But he left so he could go and help and save others by preaching God's Word to them. Jesus' eyes were always out to others.

Our sinful natures often keep us from doing that. Our sinful natures like to think "*What's in it for me?*" So we do need to be reminded of our freedom to serve. We do need to be reminded to watch out for that natural selfishness that lives in us. We do need to, at times, lift our eye from ourselves to see the needs of those around you.

But Jesus has freed you from your sin and he calls you away from selfishness to selfless service in thankful love, just like we see in Peter's mother. And again, this isn't something you *should do* this isn't something you *must do*. *Should do* and *must do* are gone through Jesus. He has set you free. You no longer have to wonder if you are doing enough for God – Jesus has already done everything perfectly for you. You don't have to worry that you haven't been good enough, thankful enough, nice enough, or anything else enough. Jesus has completely and perfectly set you free from sin. He has perfectly and completely set you free to live your life for other.

Now, instead of focusing on yourself, you get to focus on others. Like Jesus, turn your eyes always out to the needs of others. God gives you opportunity after opportunity to serve one another in love. Through such willing, heartfelt, and thankful service which naturally flows from a heart set free from sin and guilt, God shows his glory to the world through you.

God doesn't need your acts of love and service. But your neighbor does. Your family needs your love, your family needs your care. Your neighbors need your help and concern. Your family of believers here at Mountain Valley need your support and encouragement. The people in your community need your love and help. And through you, through your life of service to others, God brings his love and care and help and encouragement to others.

That's the "*Now what?*" for you. Set free from sin because Jesus came to serve you and to save you. Set free from guilt and fear and punishment, now you are free to give loving service to others. You are free to shift your gaze from yourself to others. You are free and your freedom shows in service to

others. This glory that is yours in Joining Jesus, this glory of being saved to serve, moved Luther to write: *“Who then can comprehend the riches and glory of the Christian life? It can do all things, has all things, and is in want of nothing; is lord over sin, death, and hell, and at the same time is the obedient and useful servant of all.”* Pray that God would lift your eyes to see the freedom you have in Christ and the glory you have to share in living a Christian life – a life of joyful service.

Amen

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father -- to him be glory and power for ever and ever. (Rev 1:5-7)

Amen