

**“To Preach?”**  
**Mark 1:29-39**  
**February 8, 2009**  
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If you were at Roy Barsh’s funeral service this past week, you might remember that when I read the scripture from the Sermon on the Mount

I mentioned how frustrating it must have been for Jesus to try to communicate in words what can be understood only in the language of the heart. Of course, one reason I said that was because of my own frustration. I felt as if somehow I had let Roy down. I had not been able to communicate to him in a way that he understood, it seemed to me at least, that God loved him completely and accepted him. It just seemed that Roy was never able to accept God’s love, to accept the fact, as Tillich said, that he was accepted by God.

So it is with that sense of frustration I come into the pulpit every Sunday. I suppose every preacher does, in some way. We are frustrated that we are trying to communicate in words what can be understood only in the language of the heart.

In the Hymn of Community we sang just a moment ago, we sang these words:

I love to tell the story, for those who know it best,  
Seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest.

I come into the pulpit believing you are hungering and thirsting to hear Good News.

There is good news in our scripture. It is a continuation of our scripture from last Sunday. I read the words, “When they left the Synagogue” (you remember last Sunday in the scripture Jesus was teaching in the Synagogue and healing), he and Simon, Andrew, James and John go to the home of the brothers—Simon and Andrew. When they get into the house, Jesus sees that Simon’s mother-in-law is sick with a fever. I have all kinds of mother-in-law jokes, some really good ones, I can share here, but I’ve learned at least a few things through the years and I’m going to keep those jokes to myself right now.

There is an important lesson from the healing of Simon’s mother-in-law. At the Bible Study last Wednesday evening, a woman

said, “It’s obvious that a man wrote this story.” Do you notice what happens right after she’s healed? She gets up and starts serving. Some women are nodding their heads. The lesson is this. “We are saved to serve.” We are not saved to *be* served. Jesus said, “I am among you as one who serves. I came not to *be* served, but to serve. So for each of us, a part of the gospel message is “We are saved to serve.” I know, also, that we come this morning, each of us in need of some kind of healing—physical, emotional, or spiritual. Life has a way of beating us down. We could all share our scars with each other. We come in need of this healing and the good news is we have come to the right place. Listen to these words written by a physician, a man by the name of Gerald May.

God’s grace through community involves something far greater than other people’s support and perspective. The power of grace is nowhere as brilliant or as mystical as it is in communities of faith. Its power includes not just love that comes from people and through people, but love that pours forth among people as if through the very spaces between one person and the next. Just to be in such an atmosphere is to be bathed in healing power.

Have you even sensed that when you come to church? We’re a little bit reluctant in our tradition, aren’t we? As a part of their worship, some churches will have a healing service; a laying on of hands. We’re a little reluctant, we’re a little embarrassed by that. How sad that is.

Here’s something even sadder, how sad it is to say “I’m so grateful that I am a part of this community. I feel such support from everyone here,” if that’s all we say. There is no inspiration to leave this place and share the healing we have received. That is the worse kind of selfishness, to receive gifts from God and not share those gifts.

As Beverly said during the children’s moment, at first glance what Jesus did seemed selfish. He took time from his busy schedule to be away by himself. But we all know if we don’t care for ourselves we can never care for anyone else. Jesus knew something else about the importance of some quiet time, some solitude with God.

Throughout my years in the church I have often been amazed by

this. There are some people who evidently seem they are closer to God, they are spiritually stronger to God than was Jesus. It is evident because they have no time for prayer in their lives, no quiet time. It is more than just a cliché to say “If Jesus needed to pray, I need to pray.” That is one of the great truths of our faith. Yet how much time this past week did you spend alone with God in prayer? Would it be measured in hours, minutes, or seconds? We can never take care of others unless we take care of ourselves and our own relationship with God.

We are called to share our faith in this way. We are called to share our faith in a way that God wants and expects us to do, not the way that others expect or want. G. K. Chesterson said, “Jesus sought solitude with God so he could laugh at the expectations of those who followed him.” Don’t you love that? Jesus knew who he was and *whose* he was and what God wanted and needed him to do.

What comes next is interesting. Jesus talked to the disciples about his purpose for coming to earth. The disciples, scripture says, had hunted for him. The word is literally, “chased him down.” Jesus didn’t say, “I came to teach, I came to heal,” instead he said, “I came to preach.” To preach? Surely, Jesus, of all the things that God wants you to do . . . to preach? If you’re sitting where you are and see me standing where I am, you might say to yourself, “Thank God that God never called me to preach. That’s not true. God calls everyone who accepts Christ as Lord to preach some kind of sermon.

Billy Graham tells a wonderful story of receiving an invitation from a close friend of his to speak at a graduation ceremony at a college. There was a huge honorarium offered, money that Billy Graham said he knew he could have used to help others come to Christ. He wrote his friend a letter in response to the invitation and said, “I must decline your invitation. I have been called to preach, not to speak at graduation ceremonies.” Billy Graham knew who he was.

Did you hear in the scripture what was implied? Did you hear? You have been called to preach. Oh, the word might be a little different. The word that might be used instead of “preach” might be the word, “proclaim,” which means to praise and glorify God. If you’re thinking to yourself, “I’m not Billy Graham and I’m sure not Jesus, so I’m not going to be doing a lot of preaching, you need to hear this story. I hesitated to share it with you because it’s a little embarrassing, but you need to hear this story.

A couple of weeks ago I was down here at the church on Sunday afternoon. As I was leaving the church to get into my car that was parked out on the west side of the building, I was just getting ready to get into my car and looked down at the stoplight and saw some kind of car. I wasn't sure what it was, but I knew it was the kind of car that I wanted to know what kind it was. I also knew that if I got into my car and got out on Boulder, which is a one-way street, and went all the way around the block by the time I got around the block that car would be gone. So being the genius I am I hopped in my car and made a u-turn right out here and headed south, the wrong way on a one-way street!

Meanwhile, the light had changed and this car was pulling across the intersection. As I pulled up to the light, I knew it was red coming from the other direction (I figured you could make a right turn on red even if you're going the wrong way on a one-way street), so I made a right turn on red and looked up in my mirror and behind me is one of Tulsa's finest. Now I'm thinking, "I'm going to get a ticket for going the wrong way on a one-way street, for rolling through a red light, and did I mention in my haste to get in my car I hadn't put my seatbelt on?" So I'm going to get a ticket for going the wrong way on a one-way street, running a red light, not wearing a seatbelt, and one or two counts of just utter stupidity. My plan was to make a right turn at the next corner and hope the policeman was going straight, but the next street happened to be one-way going the other way. I had to stay where I was with him right behind me. When we came to the next stoplight, I turned and, thank God, he went straight. By the way, the car was a Porsche.

One of the amazing things about scripture is that God was able to work through the man, Jesus. Think about all God did through Jesus. I would like to think that once or twice in my life, God has used me also. This scripture says to us, "God wants to use you to share your faith story." The Westminster catechism says, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." That is our calling as Christians, to share the faith story we have received.

In preparation for the sermon this week, I read a story that I had not read in quite some time. It was the story of a young woman who had surgery on her face. In the course of the surgery, the surgeon realized he had cut a nerve that affected her smile. He went into her room that evening after the surgery, noticed her there in the dim light. Her young husband was sitting in a chair beside her bed. The surgeon started to talk

to her. She had already seen a mirror and said to him, “Will my face always look like this?” He said, “Yes, I’m sorry In order to remove the tumor it was necessary to cut the nerve. I’m sorry. It will always be this way.” As he finished speaking, the young husband stood up beside his wife’s bed and looked at her crooked smile and said, “You know, I kind of like it that way. It’s cute.” He leaned over to kiss her and twisted his mouth so it would fit hers, the way perhaps that God leans over in the midst of our twisted lives to meet us face to face.

I had not read that story in several years since the time that I first read it. Close friends of mine, a colleague in ministry, went through something similar. My friend’s wife had surgery to remove a brain tumor and in the course of that tumor a surgeon cut a nerve that caused her to lose the hearing in one ear and also caused her to be paralyzed on one half of her face. She wears an eye patch most of the time because her eye won’t close, and she has that same crooked smile. I don’t know if my friend twists his mouth to kiss his wife, but I know that since the time of her surgery he has stood by her the way God stands by us in the neediest times of our lives.

I said at the beginning of this sermon it’s frustrating to try to communicate in words what can be expressed and understood only in the language of the heart. Perhaps that is the best way that each of us should share our faith—in the language of the heart. The hymn writer put it in this manner:

O how he loves you and me.  
O how he loves you and me.  
He gave his life, what more could he give?  
O how he loves you and me.  
Jesus to Calvary did go, his love for mankind to show,  
What he did there brought hope from despair,  
Oh how he loves you and me.  
Amen.