

Two Roads

1 Corinthians 9: 16-23

Mark 1 29-39



Our Gospel reading this morning comes from the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark. Let's read the 29th-39th verses:

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ 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.

³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

³⁸ Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.



It must have been truly amazing to be walking alongside Jesus during times like this, right?

Think about the magnitude of what we just read, though. These people, his disciples included, are seeing things happening in front of their very eyes that they can't explain.

It must have been unforgettable, astounding, awe-inspiring, life-changing.

We hear about these deeds so often, though, that I think we start to get used to hearing about them. Jesus heals the sick...he performs miracles...he drives out demons. Yeah, yeah. We've heard all this before.

Or actually, we are so far removed from these events that it presents us with another reaction: disbelief. We have come so far and learned so much since Jesus walked the earth as a human. We've done incredible and amazing things with science and medicine. We've created technology that has brought the world together, perhaps while simultaneously driving it apart.

And when we look at a passage like this that says this one person did things that we didn't see with our own eyes, and maybe we've never seen something of that magnitude during our lifetimes, we're confronted with two options.

We have two choices. Two roads we can follow.

We have the choice to not believe it. We can say that's too fantastic, it's impossible, it's just an embellished story. Our world has order and it works a certain way, and this Bible stuff is just too outlandish to believe. We know too much about how the world works to buy into that.

And I'll tell you a secret: that's the easier of our two options.

Because the other option is to say, "No, I do believe this. I do believe these eyewitness accounts of the life and the miracles of Jesus of Nazareth." And what makes that the hard road is that there is a lot that goes with choosing to walk that road.

Once we say that we believe this is all true, we have to also buy into the teachings of Jesus. It doesn't matter if we agree with them or not, we still have to buy into them.

If that's not hard enough, then we have to apply them to our lives.

And then, to take it a step further, we have the obligation to tell others about him.

And by doing all of that, we are going to face questions – perhaps even ridicule. People will mock us, they may laugh, they may do worse than that.

I was at a study group on Tuesday night at Grove City College. It was a small group that met in a classroom on campus, and some of the attendees had a mutual acquaintance who became the topic of conversation. I don't know this person, but apparently he is studying and preparing to move to the Middle East to teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

He's not alone, either. I know there are many more doing exactly what he's preparing to do.

I have to say: the easier road for them would be to not go.

So – the question becomes why? Why would we go down this difficult road? Why not choose the easier of the two options in front of us?

Paul wrestles with some of these same questions in our Epistle reading this morning. In his letter to the church in Corinth, he is defending his role as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Apparently, this road for him wasn't the easiest thing he ever did.

I know we've already read it once. It doesn't hurt to read it again. Allow me to reiterate to you this passage from 1 Corinthians:



¹⁶ For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷ If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel.

¹⁹ Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Paul is aware of his freedom. But with his freedom, he chooses to make himself a slave to everyone, as he puts it.

And he chooses to do all of this for two reasons. The first is for his own sake, because he knows if he has the power to preach and doesn't do it, it's not going to be good for him in the end. "Woe to me," he says, "if I do not preach the gospel."

I've heard Paul's feelings here put a more modern way: he's getting himself some fire insurance. Think about that for a second and you'll get it. If he doesn't preach the gospel, he knows he's in

trouble later. He knows where he'll end up. So to avoid that eternal fire, he's getting himself some insurance. He's going to do what he's compelled to do.

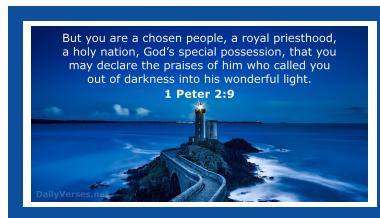
The second reason, though, is for the sake of everyone else. He is able to give the Good News to everyone, with no strings attached. He'll be whatever he needs to be to get the word out there, just so he can save a few of them.

He even knows he won't save all of them. Maybe he won't even save most of them. But his goal is to save some of them. He just wants to share the blessings of the gospel with as many as will hear it.

Powerful stuff. Powerful enough to make a hard road filled with hard things seem worth taking.

Now, you may be listening to this thinking that we're talking an awful lot about preaching. "Isn't that Pastor Adam's job? Good thing I got out of that!"

Well, I'm glad you're all sitting down for this: but preaching isn't contained to a pulpit. It's not even contained to a church.



1 Peter 2:9 tells us:

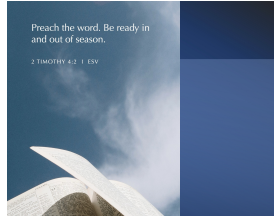
⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

A royal priesthood means that we are all preachers of the gospel. Declaring the praises of God means sharing it with others.

Who follows the church page on Facebook? If you don't, find us and hit that little button!

I signed up for a service a few months ago that automatically posts daily images on the page so I don't have to. It keeps things fresh and moving, and hopefully gives us something worthwhile and meaningful to see each day.

I tell you that because yesterday, of all the possible images to post without my input, we got this one:



“Preach the word. Be ready in and out of season.” It’s advice given to Timothy, but it’s advice for us, also.

I don’t know for sure, but maybe in light of what I was led to share this morning alongside this unplanned verse shared on our page yesterday, we’re being given some additional motivation.

There are so many people out there that will never walk into this building to hear about this on their own. We can’t reach them all by waiting to see who might come to us on a Sunday morning. Preaching needs to happen by all of God’s people and it needs to happen outside of this building just as much, maybe even more, than it happens in here.

We can be so many things to so many people. Unfortunately, we cannot save them all. But we can save some.



That was enough motivation for one apostle to choose his road, even though it ended up being the hard road.

It should be enough motivation for us, too.

We always have two roads in front of us. We can believe or not. We can preach or not.

One road is easy. But easy roads don’t always have happy endings.

The other road is harder. But for our own soul, and for the sake of those around us, that is the road worth taking.

And all of God’s people said...