

Text: Mark 2:13-17

Date: May 27, 2018

Focus: Jesus loves and accepts all people through faith.

Function: As Christians, we are not backseat drivers, we check our spiritual blindspots, and we follow Jesus.

In Jesus Name, Amen.

How many of you here remember learning to drive? For most of us – it was an exciting time. For most of our parents and teachers it was a terrifying time. And here’s the thing about driving a car – you have to learn how to drive. It doesn’t come naturally. Now, some of us are more natural at it than others, but we all have to learn the rules of the road.

I can remember that we held our first lesson over in Kensington Business Center in Mt. Prospect – not that far from here on a quiet Sunday afternoon. I can remember getting behind the wheel for the first time. I remember after I shut the door and put on my seatbelt I just sat there, unsure of what to do. After a moment or two my dad, probably sensing my nervousness said, “Let’s go!” I appreciated his confidence, but I had never done this before! And so I asked something like, “So, is it like driving a go-kart?” because that was my only frame of reference. And then I remember my dad saying, “Well, yeah, pretty much” And with that I remember slamming down the gas pedal as hard as I could – because that’s what you do with go-karts, right? I had a lot to learn. And my dad, and mom, were both very patient in teaching me to drive.

Today, in our Gospel reading from Mark 2, Jesus gives all of us a few spiritual driving lessons. There are some things about living in God’s kingdom that we all need to learn.

Our spiritual driving lessons for today doesn’t take place at Kensington Business Center, but in Capernaum, a town on the sea. One day, in the midst of teaching God’s people, Jesus stops to call one of His disciples – a man named Levi or Matthew. Now, earlier in Mark’s Gospel Jesus has already called 4 of His disciples. Jesus has already welcomed in Peter and Andrew and James and John. But, Levi, or Matthew, is different. He’s not like the other’s. He’s Jewish – like they are – but he’s also a tax-collector. It meant that he was considered to be, by most people, the scum of the earth.

You see, at that time, Israel was living under the control of the Romans. The Romans had come in a few centuries before and conquered Israel. And while Rome largely left Israel alone to do their own thing and worship their own God, Rome most certainly interested in money, which they took from the Israelites in the form of taxes. And in order to collect taxes you needed tax collectors, which is what Levi was. Tax collectors were required to pay Rome a certain amount of money each year, but anything they collected above that set amount they could keep on their own. And so tax collectors usually lied, cheated, and stole – or did whatever it took to pad their pockets. So, you can see why tax-collectors were not well-liked by the Israelites generally speaking. But, LEVI – that’s a good Jewish name – as a Jew would have been especially despised. He would have been seen as a traitor. A backstabber. Levi was stealing from his own people – God’s people – to prop up this foreign power called Rome.

It's probably hard for us to imagine how revolutionary, and mind-boggling this had to have been not only for the Pharisees in our stories but also for the other disciples, to watch Jesus call a tax-collector as a disciple. I used this example with my Wednesday Bible study this week, but one way to think of it would be like this. Imagine if we were reorganizing things around here at Living Christ and you all gave me the job of choosing a new Board of Directors. That shouldn't be too hard of a job, right, because we have so many godly, faithful, hard-working, generous people around here. But, imagine if instead of choosing our best and brightest, what if instead I hung out outside the race-track to recruit from the addicted gamblers. Or imagine if I hung out outside of the bar at 3am for people to stumble out and then brought those people on board. Imagine if waited outside the offices of those telemarketer scammers who prey on the elderly and confused and asked them to serve. That's kind of what Jesus is doing in calling this TAX COLLECTOR to be a disciple. Jesus had this giant pool of religious, faithful people for his choosing, and He chooses Levi. Not only chooses Levi but eats with Him and a whole lot of other sinners too.

And that's when we get our first spiritual driving lesson. It's a lesson about the dangers of judging other people. And the first lesson Jesus teaches us is this: Jesus does not need any backseat drivers. He had plenty of those in His day – the Pharisees. They thought they knew best. They thought they knew who Jesus should spend time with, who was worthy and who was not. They thought they knew who Jesus should call, who He should accept. But, they don't know what is best. They didn't have Jesus perspective. They didn't get it. And so we learn an important lesson – Jesus doesn't need any backseat drivers.

And that's because Jesus can see things from the drivers seat that we can't from the backseat. Jesus can peer into hearts and minds. Jesus can see this thing called faith that we can only guess at. Jesus, most importantly I think, sees that NONE of us is worthy and so He came for ALL. We divide people up all the time – these people are worthy, these are not. These are the good people, these are the bad people. These people are worthy of love, these aren't. But, we are NOT called to make those judgments. And, if we had God's perspective, we would see that ALL people are worthy of love!

Our second spiritual driving lesson comes from verse 17. In verse 17 Jesus says, "It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners." This is a lesson about judging ourselves. Jesus is teaching us here to check out blind-spots. Because if you think that you are all good on your own – than you have a problem. If you think you are righteous and holy all by yourself – than you are in for a rude awakening. If you think that you are so much better than everyone else, or that you don't need God, or that it's everyone ELSE who's got a problem, or that it's everyone else who needed to confess their sins this morning, but not you – then you are just waiting to crash. Check your blind-spots, Jesus is saying. That's what the Pharisees did NOT do, right? They were living as if everything was all good. As if they were better than everyone else. As if they had it all together, as if they didn't need Jesus.

You see, Jesus wants us to check out blind-spots because sin, and especially the sin of self-righteousness has a sneaky way of coming up alongside of us and sitting right where we can't see it. And sometimes it just hangs out there for a while waiting to cause a crash. For some of

us, maybe it's pride. Others of us maybe its materialism. For others of us maybe it's jealousy. These things sneak into our lives and we convince ourselves that they aren't there. But, Jesus wants us to look for it. To be honest about it, and to admit that it's there in our own lives. Because the ones who can see their sin and admit that they are sinful, are the ones who receive Jesus' righteousness. And the ones who can admit that they are sick, are the ones who will be healed. Jesus wants us to check out blind-spots and notice our sin NOT to beat us up or make us feel rotten, but so that the burden and weight of our sin and guilt and be handed over for JESUS to carry, and so that we can give that sin to Him to be forgiven.

The final spiritual-driving lesson comes from the beginning of our reading. After Jesus passes by Levi's toll-booth, Jesus looks at him and says pretty simply, "Follow Me". And that's a lesson for us today to. We are called to follow Jesus. We are NOT called to look for shortcuts. We are not called to find our own way. We are NOT called to blaze our own trails. Just, follow Jesus. Now, this might seem limiting or constricting, but I believe it's actually freeing. You do not need to figure out the way towards fulfillment or joy. You don't have to figure out how to make God happy with you. You don't have to waste time spinning your wheels going down fruitless paths you hoped would take you where you need to be. Jesus says, "Follow Me!" He is the way towards fulfillment. He is the way to true joy. Through His perfect life and sacrifice we are made holy and our Heavenly Father is happy with us. And so, we follow Jesus.

Which, that sounds nice, right, but maybe you are wondering, "What does that actually mean? Or, what does it look like?" Well, first I think it means living like Jesus. Just like Jesus ate with outcasts and the "scum" of the earth, so should we. Just like Jesus had mercy on sinners, so should we. Just like Jesus loved ALL people – no matter where they'd been or what they'd done – so should we. And, like Jesus, we don't just love those people with words, but with real, tangible action. Following Jesus means we need to serve like Jesus and sacrifice like Jesus and suffer like Jesus did. That's the first part.

And the second, and most important part, I think is simply fixing your eyes on Jesus. Look to His cross. Gaze upon His empty tomb. Reflect on His perfect life and righteousness. All too often we are focused on what is right in front of us, aren't we? We're focused on the bills that need to be paid, and the ways that we've been hurt. We're focused on our 9to5 or family drama we need to clear up. And those are important things, but like driving, if you focus on what is right in front of you, you'll end up in a wreck. I remember someone teaching me that along the way – that if you only look at what's just past the front tip of your car, you'll have problems and you'll miss the bigger picture. Before you know it there will be a pothole, and if you haven't looked up, you're going to end up in it. If you're only focused on what's immediately in front of you, you won't see that traffic has stopped and now you don't have time to brake. When you're driving, you need to lift up your eyes and focus a little further down the road. And as Christians we need to lift our eyes and focus on Jesus. We need to look to Him and trust that HE will take us to where we need to go.

In Jesus Name, Amen.