

**Welcome:**

Greetings to you. Welcome to Germantown Church of God. It is Valentine's Day Weekend. Happy Valentine's Day to you. I hope that you will be able to enjoy some time with loved ones this weekend. Maybe not in person. Maybe you won't be able to go out or go to a movie to celebrate. You may not be able to go to a Fancy Restaurant. Could do Fast Food Drive Through. But you can be creative. Telephone. A Zoom Video visit. It is always wonderful to express our feelings of love toward others. There is something about expressing love that warms our hearts. And it is always wonderful to receive an expression of love from someone special – a card, candy, flowers, a kiss. It is good to love and be loved. One of the greatest writings about love is found in the Bible.

**Opening Scripture**

**1 Corinthians 13**

**Scripture**

**Mark 2:1-12**

**Message**

**Getting Close to Jesus**

Our Church Mission statement says: ***Germantown Church of God exists to move people who are broken spiritually, physically, emotionally or relationally into the presence of Jesus where they can experience healing and be transformed into the image of Jesus.*** That mission statement grows out of this passage of Scripture in Mark's gospel. This is one of my favorite stories in the gospels. There are so many lessons in this story (Sermons Galore!), but I just want to focus on one point in the story today. Mark's gospel is fast paced. It moves quickly from one story to another. No commercial breaks. You can almost find yourself getting short of breath, because the action moves so fast. Jesus has begun his ministry. He went to John to be baptized. Then he is driven by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days where he was tempted by Satan. He emerges from that time in the wilderness and begins his ministry. He preaches his first sermon – ***“Repent and believe the good news.”*** (that's it!) He calls disciples to follow him. He delivers people from the power of evil spirits, he heals people. Lots of action. There is a brief change of pace in the midst of all of this activity. In spite of his busy days, Jesus manages to find time to get alone to pray. He recognizes the importance of taking care of His soul by spending time in the presence of His Father. But he is quickly called back into action.

Chapter 2 begins with Jesus returning to Capernaum. It was a small town. Mark tells us that this was now Jesus' home. He grew up in Nazareth, but now resides in Capernaum. Many of us probably like to think of home as a place to rest, a place to get away from the hustle and bustle of work, and people. But that was not to be on this day. Jesus is in a home – maybe Peter's house. Jesus was “preaching the word.” Mark's gospel does not give us a lot of content of what Jesus says. He is more focused on the impact Jesus had on people. We may imagine that his teaching on this occasion may have been similar to some of his other preaching in the early days of his ministry – Sermon on the Mount; parables. But as he is preaching, he is also ministering to people. There were a lot of people gathered. You could not get near the door because of the crowd. As Jesus is teaching and healing, some men began to scratch at the roof of the house above Jesus. They had brought a friend to Jesus who needed his healing touch. Their friend was paralyzed, so they carried him on a stretcher. Because they could not get through the door, they dug a hole in the roof above Jesus. They were desperate for their friend to get help. They then lowered the paralyzed man through the hole in the ceiling and lowered him right into the presence of Jesus. When Jesus meets this man he is moved with compassion and reaches out to him. He **first of all** tells the man ***“Son, your sins are forgiven.”*** The religious leaders who were there objected to Jesus making this declaration. We're not going to spend time talking about their resistance today. One point that we do need to emphasize here is that we are not to conclude from this statement from Jesus that this man is paralyzed because of some sin he may have committed. All sickness is the result of sin. If there were no sin in the world, there would be no sickness. Sometimes we experience physical brokenness because of something we have done. But not every sickness is the result of a sin. Jesus recognizes that the man needs more than healing from his paralysis. So he starts with his spiritual brokenness. **Secondly**, Jesus addresses his physical brokenness. He tells the man – paralyzed man who

cannot walk himself – **to get up, carry your mat and go home.** So Jesus declares that the man is forgiven, and then he heals the man's brokenness.

Now, the point I want to draw our attention to today is this: **when this man comes into the presence of Jesus, He is made whole – spiritually (Forgiveness) and physically (healing).** When in our mission statement we declare that it is our purpose to get people into the presence of Jesus, **we believe** that that is where people can be made whole. We may be able to provide people with some assistance, but ultimately if they are going to be brought into a state of wholeness, we must get them to Jesus. When they are in the presence of Jesus they can hear his words of Forgiveness. They can experience his healing touch.

Now I want to ask you to move this story to a personal level. I want you to think about **what you need from Jesus.** And **what are you doing to get yourself into his presence** where you can hear him speak words of healing and transformation. On the Church calendar we are going to be moving into a new season. This coming Wednesday is known as Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent. Lent is the season that leads up to Holy Week, and Easter. In Holy week we remember Jesus' last week, leading up to his crucifixion. Sometimes the events of that week are referred to as **The Passion.** His death on the cross was necessary to His work of forgiveness. He died to pay the penalty for our sin. He died to break the power of sin in our lives. And so it was our spiritual condition of being alienated from God by our sin that caused his death on the cross. Early Church leaders believed that it is important that we spend some time in reflection, and repentance for our sinfulness, before the celebration of Easter. So a period of about 40 days was established for this purpose – a season of purification, so to speak. Repentance. Cleansing. Purification.

The Lenten season is a time that lends itself to the practice of getting ourselves into the presence of Jesus. It is a season when many Christians will intentionally set aside time in their day, in their week for spiritual reflection and growth. It is a time to **get ourselves into the presence of Jesus** where we can hear Him speak words of healing and restoration. In Matthew 11:28 Jesus offers this invitation: <sup>28</sup> ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*** Jesus invites us to come into his presence to yoke ourselves to him and learn from him. The result will be that we will find rest for our souls. The invitation to Come to Him, implies that we are going to turn away from something else. Bobby Gross, in his book Living the Christian Year, says: ***"the season of lent asks us to embrace a spiritual gravity, a downward movement of soul, a turning from our self-sufficiency an sinfulness In such quiet turning, we are humbled and thus made ready to receive from God a fresh and joyous grace."***

**How do we get ourselves into the presence of Jesus:** I would offer several suggestions:

- **Prayer** – Not Christmas "Gift List" kinds of prayers. Prayer for the condition of our soul
- **Solitude and Meditation** – Get away; get alone; find a Prayer closet. Turn off the distractions – TV, Music,
- **Scripture Reading** – Spend more time reading Scripture than you normally do – Read through a gospel or two; Read, and then go back and read again and write down instructions from the passage
- **Devotional Reading**
- **Fasting/Sacrifice:** Some people during the Lenten season will choose to "give up something" – not as a bargaining chip with God, but to identify with Jesus' sacrifice; to be reminded to spend time with Jesus. When you are fasting – from food, or some activity – every time you would normally engage in that activity you will think about why you are fasting – because you want to spend some time with Jesus, listening to Him.

**How does Jesus Speak to us?**

- **Through the words of Scripture**
- **Through the words and writings of others –**
- **Through the voice of His Spirit -** John 10:3-5: <sup>3</sup> ***The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know***

**his voice.** <sup>5</sup> *But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."*

So my challenge to you today and for the next 7 weeks leading up to Easter, is to intentionally devote some time to getting yourself into the presence of Jesus. Use the season of Lent to "**Get Closer to Jesus**". Don't wait till Ash Wednesday morning to decide what you are going to do. You need to plan your practice. You need to prepare. But make sure you do something that will get you into the presence of Jesus. Give Him access to your heart, your mind, your imagination, your longings. Listen for His voice.