

## Good Shepherd Lutheran Church - Watertown, WI

### **“Just Say No”**

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*“Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them” (Lk. 4:40).*

What a busy day it had been for Jesus in Capernaum! First, He was preaching in the synagogue. That all was sharply interrupted when a demon-possessed man went on a rant. “Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God.” It was all so startling and embarrassing, nobody knew what to do, what to say; only Jesus who promptly rebuked the evil spirit and set the man free of him. The people were amazed. They talked about it all as they walked home. Luke says, “Reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region.”

From there, Jesus went to the home of Simon Peter. Peter’s mother-in-law was ill in bed with a fever. They appealed to him on her behalf. This time he rebukes not a demon, but the fever. It leaves her, and immediately she hops out of bed and starts serving them.

Eventually the sun goes down, marking the end of the Sabbath. This also means it’s okay to start working again. It’s okay to bear burdens. So, from all around Capernaum, people converge on Peter’s little house, bearing their burdens. They bring with them their sick with their menagerie of maladies. Some hobble along, holding on to another’s arm. Others are barely holding on to life and need to be carried. Some have no signs of illness on the outside, but inside everything hurts, and they don’t know why. Some have knuckles and knees gnarled by arthritis. Some are dizzy and light-headed. Others have lungs rattling with mucus. You name it, it’s all there. And they’re all coming to Jesus.

The Good Physician pays due attention to each one. He places his hands on each one, and heals them, no matter the disease or its severity. Nothing confuses Him. No illness or disorder outwits Him or can resist His healing powers.

Meanwhile, more demons are coming out of the woodwork. The mere presence of Jesus seems to rouse and agitate and expose them. He’s the black light and they are glowing fluorescent. They know who Jesus is, and it makes them shriek. But he simply expels them.

The next morning, he rises while it’s still dark, and finds a desolate place to pray. It’s a restorative habit. After a time, the sun comes up and the people line up again at Peter’s house. They are also ill or injured. They need Jesus and have faith that He will help them, but He’s not there. When Peter informs Him that people are waiting for Him, Jesus chooses not to go back. “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.”

The people of Capernaum wanted Him to stay, but Jesus said “No.” According to His humanity, He knew His limits. He knew He could not please everybody. And He also knew His mission, His identity. By leaving Capernaum, He was saying “no” to them. Surely it made some angry at Him, others deeply disappointed with Him. They had their own plans for Him.

Now, think about your own life. Sometimes you have to say “No” to people too, and that can be hard, right? Most of you like to please others. But sometimes you must disappoint them to do what God wants you to do. Sometimes you must make people angry at you so you can be faithful to God. Sometimes you must prove yourself a letdown to people you care about, to prove yourself a blessing to other people you also care about.

The question is, how do you know when to say “no” and when to say “yes”? Sometimes it’s necessary to say “no” to care for yourself or others. Jesus did this too. After the feeding of the 5,000 the disciples were dead tired. Yet still this huge crowd is lingering, and they have many needs. What does Jesus do? He made the disciples get into the boat and head for the other side of the sea. Then He dismissed the crowds and went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. He said “no” to the crowds to take care of Himself and his friends (Mt. 14:22-23). He knew His own limitations and those of His disciples too.

As Christians we are called to care for others too. We are also called to care for ourselves and our families. Saying “no” is not necessarily un-Christlike. It can be a humble admission of our limitations.

That crowd He fed eventually found Him again, and He knows why. They want to make Him their own personal bread king. He tells them no. “You are looking for me because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life.” (Jn. 6:26-27). He goes on to speak of the Bread of Life

referring to His body and blood, but they will have none of it. Usually, to feed the hungry is something we should do. But Jesus will not allow them to seek only that which is good (bread) while spurning what is best (the Bread of Life). Jesus knew His identity and His mission. Being their baker was not His calling. You have callings too. Sometimes you must say “no” to say within your callings.

Jesus also said “no” when He was asked to mediate between two brothers fighting over an inheritance. He doesn’t want to be roped into being a legal arbiter in worldly matters. Similarly, we are not always obliged to solve other people’s problems. You don’t have to choose a side in a family dispute.

How do you know when to say “no”? Clearly, God counsels us through His Word. He counsels us also through other individuals. Sometimes your best counselors are not your friends, because they lean towards telling you what you want to hear. Your best counselors are those who are willing to tell you what you need to hear.

I suspect some of you have a lot of people making demands on you. It might be your boss who wants you to participate in a shady deal, or pull another six hour week. It might be your spouse, who thinks junior has what it takes for the major leagues, and therefore life starts orbiting around sport. Maybe it’s a grown son who’s been smoking pot and it seems to have taken the wind out of his sails. He has no ambition, no drive, takes no initiative and wants to come home and live with you again. It’s so, so hard, but sometimes you have to say “no” precisely because you love him. Helping irresponsible people avoid the natural consequences of their choices is not helping them. He might pull this one out, “And you call yourself a Christian!” But saying “no” does not mean you are callous or un-Christlike. Certainly, we don’t want to excuse ourselves too easily from helping, but we also don’t want to become enablers.

Sometimes must say no to follow Jesus. Remember when a would-be disciple said, “Lord, I will follow you, but let me first bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” Normally to honor your parents is something required by the Commandments, but this man needed to hear that following Jesus must take precedence over everything else.

You alone are responsible for your life. When you say “no” to people, it doesn’t mean you don’t care about them. It means you are taking ownership for being the steward of your own resources. Hopefully when you say “no” it’s not so you can spend more time in front of the screens, but so you can live life as God would have you live it, not as others would.

There’s another clue as to when to say “no”. If what you volunteer to do makes you miserable, maybe say “no” to that and say “yes” to a different opportunity that is meaningful and rewarding for “God loves a cheerful giver.”

Another clue: People who cannot accept your “no’s” and get angry at you or try to manipulate you into saying “yes” are those you probably don’t want in your life anyway. When they hear you say “no” enough, they’ll disappear. Conversely, those who can accept your “no’s” are high quality people, and you do want them in your life.

Another clue: Don’t try to please the hypercritical. You’ll never win with them; don’t even bother. Jesus never tried to win the favor of the Pharisees. Sometimes it seems, he went out of the way to peeve them instead, as when he kept looking to heal people on the Sabbath.

How do you know when to say “no”? Why not ask God? Take advantage of the gift of prayer. You are His baptized child. Ask your Father for a decision pleasing to Him. Sometimes with a big decision, in my prayers I say, “You know I’m leaning in this direction. If this is not your will, make it abundantly clear to me.” Do not just ask God to bless a decision you already made. Give Him the freedom to put His finger down on the other side of the scale because you know His will is good.

The people of Capernaum wanted Jesus to stay. But He said “no”. That was the only way He could say “Yes” to God the Father. It was the only way He could say “Yes” to people in other towns who had not yet heard the Good News. It was the only way He could say “Yes” to those in other towns who were ill or possessed. Think about it: it was the only way Jesus could say yes to His calling to be your Savior from sin and death.

Jesus kept saying “no”, and it was also with you and me in mind. After fasting forty days and nights, Jesus said no to the temptations of the devil in the wilderness so he could be the faultless Lamb of God for you. When Peter tried to thwart him from going to the cross, Jesus said, “Get behind me Satan.” In Gethsemane, when every cell of His body wanted to flee, Jesus said “no” to that survival instinct, and remained faithful to His identity and His mission for you.

The people of Capernaum wanted Him to stay. But He didn’t come just to heal bodies in Capernaum. He came to heal your soul and ultimately your body too. His “no” in Capernaum became a “yes” at Calvary. His “No” to the people of Capernaum became His “Yes” to you. His “No” to the easy work of healing others or giving them bread, became His yes to the agonizing work of healing you through His suffering and death, and giving you the Bread of Life.

If Jesus had said “Yes” to the people of Capernaum, He would have been giving them control over His life, and we would have lost our Savior. With Jesus you can say “No” too to some people making demands of you, *so that* you can say “Yes” to others who need you more. Amen.