

Mark 1:29-39

In this passage, Mark describes a “day in the life” of Jesus’ early ministry. From this account, Mark’s readers receive a glimpse of the early dissemination of the good news. The passage begins on the Sabbath after Jesus has spoken and exorcised a demon in the synagogue and concludes the following morning with Jesus expanding his ministry. Thus, the movement of setting marks three key transitions in this passage: movement from inside Simon’s house, presumably in the afternoon (Mark 1:29-31), to the crowds at the doorway in the evening (1:32-34), and finally, early the following morning, to a deserted place (1:35-38).

Jesus’ first act in this passage, healing Simon’s mother-in-law, is done very privately. The setting of the healing at Simon and Andrew’s house brings the disciples back into the narrative as witnesses to the healing. The healing also looks forward to the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees about what a person could do on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-3:6). Jesus has just been publicly teaching and casting out a demon in the synagogue on the Sabbath so it is significant that he also heals Simon’s mother-in-law privately on the Sabbath.

The final scene moves to an hour early in the morning while it is still dark. In direct contrast to the crowds and busyness of the previous scenes, Jesus is now at a “deserted place” (1:35). In the previous two scenes, the disciples have been in Jesus’ presence. Simon’s mother-in-law is now well; their friends and relatives (inhabitants of Capernaum) are healed; and the man who performed the healings wants something to do with them!

Their stress the following morning when they cannot find Jesus is understandable. When “Simon and his companions” are searching for him, the verb used here does not imply a passive looking (1:36). These men are hunting for Jesus in intent desperation. Their hunting is rewarded. Mark emphasizes that while Jesus is elusive and cannot be controlled by the whims and desires of others, he can also be found in a single-minded search.

Jesus decides not to return to Capernaum, defying the expectations of his disciples. Instead, he chooses to move on, proclaiming the message to others. Thus, this day in Capernaum, privately and publicly, may serve as a model for Jesus’ ministry in the region of Galilee with growing expectations for what may happen as his ministry expands.