

February 4, 2024
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Mark 1:29-39 (Isaiah 40:21-31)

JESUS CAME TO PREACH THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Today is the second to the last Sunday in the season of Epiphany. During the season of Epiphany our Gospel lessons focus on the revelation of Jesus being God in the flesh of man, and Savior of the world. Two weeks ago we heard Jesus proclaiming:

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:14–15)

God is no longer speaking through His prophets. The reign and rule of God is present in the person, work, and Word of Christ Jesus. Every time He speaks, the people are hearing the very voice of God. Last week we heard Jesus teaching in the synagogue. The people:

“... were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.” (Mark 1:22)

The Son of God preaches and teaches with the authority of the God the Father who sent Him. As with the Father, the Son’s Word is creative and authoritative, accomplishing the purpose and succeeding in the thing for which God sends it: forgiving sins, healing the sick, casting out demons, and raising the dead. (cf: Isaiah 55:11) His touch has the power to heal and to renew both body and soul. All His work in Word and deed reveals to us a glimpse of our living in the new heavens and a new earth ushered in when Christ returns.

As a result of Adam’s sin in the Garden, all creation and all mankind have fallen under God’s curse and judgment. Every sort of corruption, suffering, and death in the world is evidence of this original sin and fall. Sin, sickness, and death go together. You don’t get sick and die because you sinned a specific sin... at least in the wide sense. Yes, some sinful actions have physical consequences. Substance abuse can cause a deterioration of your health and death. Careless driving might cause your death and the death of others. Immoral and promiscuous lifestyles bring dire health risks and destroy relationships. But God isn’t necessarily trying to tell you something when get the flu or receive a life-threatening diagnosis.

God is indeed omnipotent and in control over His entire creation and the forces of evil. But just because something happens in this corrupt and fallen world, or happens to you and me corrupt and fallen creatures, it doesn’t mean that it comes directly from the hand of God. Pain, suffering, and death are symptoms and evidence of creation’s and mankind’s bondage to sin, and need of salvation and restoration.

In Christ Jesus, the reign and rule of God is present, breaking into the world of sin, sickness, and the powers of the devil. Wherever Jesus goes in His earthly ministry, He goes with the purpose of proclaiming and teaching the Good News of what God is now doing through Christ Himself and with the purpose of driving back sin and all its effects. It all culminates with Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave as He defeats sin, death, and the grave. And while sin, sickness, and death still ravage their ugly effects on us poor miserable sinners and all creation, we eagerly await Christ's return on the Last Day when He will raise all who died with lifesaving faith in Him into eternal life in the new heavens and a new earth where there is no sin, sickness, or death – but restoration and renewal of God's creation and for the liberty of His children.

In today's Gospel text Jesus leaves the synagogue and enters the house of Simon and Andrew, along with James and John. Simon's mother-in-law is in bed ill with a fever, and they tell Jesus about her. She doesn't come to Jesus, but He comes to her with healing. He doesn't say a word but takes her by the hand, lifts her up, and the fever flees. Jesus grants her healing and restoration.

Simon's mother-in-law doesn't require rest and recuperation from her illness. Jesus has restored her – and she begins to serve Jesus and His disciples, serving God and her neighbor. She is healed by Jesus! So she offers her own little sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise. She offers herself as a living sacrifice, and she serves them in her vocation just as God calls you to serve and love your neighbor in your vocation. (cf: Romans 12:1)

St. Mark records that at sundown:

"... the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him." (Mark 1:33–34)

The reign and rule of God is present in the person, work, and Word of Christ Jesus. Everyone was healed, both those with diseases and those with demons. And the demons were silenced. They knew who Jesus was and why He came. But it was too early in Jesus' ministry for His identity as the Messiah to be made known. While many of the people were looking for the Messiah, they were looking for a political savior, not a Savior from sin, death, and the devil.

Next St. Mark tells us that:

"... very early in the morning, while it was still dark, [Jesus] departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed." (Mark 1:35)

This is very instructive for us sinful humans. God the Son prayed. Communication with the Father was important and a priority for Jesus. He prayed because He was a man. And while He was still God and had been anointed with the Holy Spirit in His Baptism, He stayed in close communication with the Father. Aside from His high priestly prayer on the night when He was betrayed, we don't know the specifics of His prayers. (cf: John 17). But it's likely that His prayers were for strength against temptation and for guidance and strength to carry out the mission of His Father's will. So, if prayer was important for Jesus, it is all the more imperative that you and I go to the Father in prayer in the Name of the Son.

While Jesus was praying, Simon and the others came to tell Him that everyone is looking for Him. Everyone is looking for Jesus' because of His miracles and exorcisms. They're looking for the healing and renewal of their bodies – but not of their souls. And that's when St. Mark records Jesus saying:

“Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” (Mark 1:38)

And that's what Jesus did.

“...he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.” (Mark 1:39)

Jesus left all the sick with various diseases and the demon possessed behind at in Capernaum. His miraculous healings, His casting out demons, His feeding of the thousands, and His raising the dead are not why God became flesh and entered His creation. His purpose was to preach... the preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God which has the power to heal unto eternal life – healing and renewal of both body and soul. And what is the Good News of the Kingdom? It's that the reign and rule of God is present in the person, work, and Word of Christ Jesus and Him crucified for sinners such as you and me. He came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. (cf: Mark 10:45) You're not ransomed with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, the spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. (1 Peter 1:18–19)

Despite her healing, Simon's mother-in-law would get sick again, and one day she would get sick and die. So too, all who Jesus healed from their various diseases... all from whom He cast out demons. They would get sick again. Jesus healed them in body only for them to die a bodily death another day.

You and I are much like the crowds in our text. Our lives revolve around our bodies and health. When your body and health are threatened with sickness and suffering, where's the first place to which you run? To Jesus? Probably not. More than likely, you run to the doctor. Or you run to the doctor and then pray to Jesus. But what is it that you pray for? I know what I pray for. I pray: *“Lord God, take this pain and sickness away! Heal my body so I can get back to a normal life... a long life!”* You body and mine and our good health have become our own idols for which we must repent.

When the body goes wrong everything goes wrong. When the body hurts the whole person hurts. When the body is weak, the soul is distressed. When the body fails, faith wavers and is weak. You and I have attached our wellbeing, our happiness, our joy, our quality of life, to our bodies so much so that when the body needs treatment, we neglect the soul. One thing is for sure, one day, all your idols will fail. Your health, your wealth, your good looks and popularity will not be able to save you. Unless Jesus returns really soon, the day will come when you will be laying on your death bed and all that you have and all that your are will fail. None of it will come to your rescue. None of it will save you. Only Jesus can heal and renew both body and soul in heaven.

In our text, everyone is looking for Jesus – but they're looking for the wrong reason. They're looking for the healing of their bodies but not for their soul. And how does Jesus respond? He leaves town. He moves on. He has come to preach and to teach because His preaching and

teaching is good for the soul and what's good for the soul is ultimately good for the body. Just as sure as Jesus came to Simon's mother-in-law, He comes to you. Jesus comes to you today with healing right where He promises to be. He comes to you wherever His Gospel is preached in its purity and His Sacraments are administered according to His institution. He's always found in His Word and Sacraments and wherever two or three are gathered in His Name.

God adopted you and saved you in baptismal waters:

“... by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on [you] richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace [you] might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:5–7)

As an heir of Christ, you are an heir of all the gifts that He won for you on the cross, namely forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. So while all of creation is groaning to be set free from the bondage to corruption, (cf: Romans 8:18–22) and while sin, sickness, and death continue to ravage their ugly effects on us poor miserable sinners and all creation, the sufferings of this world are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed when Christ's return on the Last Day. Though your outer self is wasting away, your inner self is being renewed day by day by Word and Sacrament. The afflictions you face are but momentary, preparing you for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, when your perishable body puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality. That is when death is swallowed up in victory. (cf: 1 Corinthians 15:53–57; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18) Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.