

Epiphany 5 – February 8, 2009
Abiding Peace Lutheran Church – Budd Lake, NJ
Mark 1:29-39

Today's Gospel text picks up just where we left off last week. Last week's reading and the beginning of today's are intended to form a single unit, a "day-in-the-life" sort of story, but for some strange reason they got broken up in our lectionary readings.

So just a quick refresher on last week's reading: Jesus and his disciples went to Capernaum. When the sabbath came, Jesus entered the synagogue and began to teach. The people were all astounded at his teaching, because he taught as one having authority. Then he was challenged by man with the unclean spirit, who recognized Jesus as the Holy One of God. Jesus cast out the spirit, and the people were still amazed.

And so we get to today's reading. It's still the same day, the sabbath. They go to Simon Peter's house, only to find the hostess in bed with a fever. And with one single, simple action – taking her by the hand and lifting her up – Jesus heals her.

Now, there's a reason I've a bit belabored the point, recounting last week's reading and the beginning of today's, and the reason is this: These two stories are supposed to be read together. When we read them this way we see that:

- 1) Jesus has the power to heal all sorts of people – he healed both a man and a woman;
- 2) Jesus has the power to heal in all sorts of places – a synagogue or holy place and in a house, a common place; and,
- 3) Jesus has the power to heal all sorts of ailments – those of a supernatural or demonic variety, or those that are natural, such as a fever.

Moving on in the text, we hear that, presumably because his fame had begun to spread, many people in need of healing of various sorts started to show up. And we're told he cured many people who were afflicted. But remember what I said last week? That in the Gospel of Mark, only us, the readers, and the demons know who Jesus is? So here Mark tells us, "Jesus would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him."

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Now the irony of today's Gospel text is not lost on me. How ironic that I stand here preaching to you about Jesus the healer while I am in the midst of the worst cold I can ever remember having. It's times like these that sometimes leave a preacher wondering if there can't be a little healing for me?

But in truth, it's the last part of today's text that interests me the most. Here's what I see happening in this text. Jesus has just had a very full evening. He's spent the entire time caring for all those people who hurried to see him because they'd heard there was a new miracle man in town.

And yet, remember two Sundays ago? Jesus begins his ministry by declaring, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." And last Sunday we heard that he was a smash hit when he entered the synagogue and began to preach.

But somehow the train got off the tracks when he healed the man with the unclean spirit. Now all people wanted from him was healing; they weren't interested in hearing him preach anymore. The message had been lost.

This is where I – a person who is at present desperately in need of a healing miracle – take comfort. For I know something that those people in Jesus' time didn't understand. And I hope you know it, too.

While Jesus' healing miracles were a great and much-needed gift to those who were healed, that wasn't the sort of healing they most needed. Jesus knew this, which is why he took time to re-group, then refocused on his preaching mission.

The ultimate sort of healing that they – and we, all of us – need is our reconciliation with God. This healing Jesus sought to bring through his preaching mission.

And we, inheritors of his gift and mission, are to do likewise. While we are to go through our lives doing acts of Christian charity which will bring healing and health to those whose lives we touch, we should always remember that this mission is secondary to that mission that will bring ultimate healing to the world: Telling all of God's love to us in Jesus Christ. It is only through him that we all will experience that ultimate sort of healing, when all of creation will be restored to its intended wholeness.

Amen.

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