

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church

Glory in Galilee: It's Personal

Mark 1:29-39

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

³⁸ Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

If you know much about Jesus, then it doesn't surprise you that he went to church on the Sabbath Day. Nor does it surprise you that there in Capernaum's synagogue he showed a little of his hidden glory by preaching with authority and driving out demons. It's what he does after the service, as recorded in today's Holy Gospel, that's maybe surprising. He goes to a lowly little domicile, the humble house of fishermen Simon and Andrew. And it probably smelled like it too. But no matter. That's where he goes. The One who had been going around proclaiming his coming as nothing less than the coming of the kingdom of God ... the One who has been calling men from their work to be about his work ... the One who had just proved himself to be the promised Prophet greater than Moses ... the One who is mightier than unclean spirits and strikes fear into them. Surely the Word Incarnate, the Son of God himself, has more important things to do than to sit around with the guys at Simon's house. Surely there were more messianic things for him to do! Places to go, people to see. And indeed, there were. But not that day after church. For that afternoon there was nothing more important to Jesus, no place he'd rather be, than there in this humble home with Simon Peter's sick mother-in-law.

And there it is again, the hidden yet spectacular glory of Jesus Christ! Hidden in the humblest of circumstances and focused on such a run-of-the-mill concern. Yet spectacular because it shows him as that awesome, holy God drawn near not just to save the world; but also who has time for you ... is concerned about you and your problems ... and has personally come to save you.

That's what Isaiah was hinting at in the First Lesson. Yes, he said, God Almighty "sits enthroned above the circle of the earth" and from there its people could look to him insignificant, "like grasshoppers" (Is 40:22). And yes, "He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing" (Is 40:23). The stars and planets he keeps in their places, and their number – beyond our knowing – he knows. Compared to such cosmic concerns and divine interests, perhaps you have thought, "Who am I?" Or as the prophet put it, "My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God" (Is 40:27b). For with all that is going on in the universe, why should God even know about me, let alone care about me? And if all we know of the glory of God is the vastness of his creation and the infinite greatness and power and knowledge required to make it and sustain it even now, then that seems like a legitimate question with a self-evident answer. He certainly does have more important work to do than doing anything more for me.

And yet, Isaiah says, that's not the case! God's infinite greatness, power and knowledge doesn't make him overlook you, they've took on flesh and have been focused on you. "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak" (Is 40:29). That's exactly what the Almighty did for Simon's mother-in-law. In person of Jesus we see this most special glory of God that is concerned even for the personal problems of you.

Once word got out, “that evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed” (Mark 1:32). And he did for them as he had done for Simon’s mother-in-law. Men, women, young, old. Or to finish Isaiah’s thought, “Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall” (Is 40:30). Even those in the prime and strength of life have problems. I don’t have to tell you that. But here’s the good news that I do, Isaiah also said: “those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Is 40:31).

In other words, there’s a restoration, a new life, for those who hope in the Lord. Jesus gives us a glimpse of that with his healing glory. But the healing itself was not the goal. It was not the end-all. If it was, then those who came looking for him the next day should have rightly been mad at God since he didn’t stay and heal them too. And we could rightly be mad when he doesn’t help us with our problems too. But physical healing – as glorious as it is – isn’t the point. In fact, all those Jesus healed that evening would succumb again – sooner or later – to illness and death. The healing, then, was a sign, a pointer, to the greater restoration Jesus had come to provide when all illness, all weariness, even death itself will be finally ended. In the individual of Jesus, the Lord and Giver of life has come to provide that life ... for you.

And that’s why just like the people of Capernaum we should keep coming to him with our problems. Like Simon’s bed-ridden mother-in-law, we can’t do anything for Jesus. We are tired and weary from another week in the world, another week under the assaults of Satan, another week of weakness and failure. So, you come because Jesus is here for you, and he will listen to your confession and speak his word of forgiveness to you. You come here because the eternal, all powerful, all knowing God has promised to serve you here in Word and Sacrament. As Isaiah would later say some chapters after the one our First Lesson came from, “by his wounds we are healed” (53:5). Healed from sin’s guilt. Healed from death’s sting. This is his strength against your temptation, his power for when you grow tired and weary under the burdens and struggles and trials of this life. For men and young and old.

And when you have been thus raised from sin and death by your Savior ... Simon’s mother-in-law got up and “began to wait on them” (Mark 1:29). She put a kettle on. Made some bread. Served a Sabbath brunch. Might not seem like a big deal in comparison to what Simon would be doing, but it wasn’t about what she was doing. It was about who she was. This was her epiphany! That she, the sick old mother-in-law who could have just as easily been ignored on her bed in the back room, was precious to Jesus. In him the kingdom of God had come to her. And he had taken her by her own hand and helped her up.

You are precious too. And you know to whom you are precious: “The Lord ... the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth” (Is 40:28). He has taken you into his heart in Baptism. He has put himself in your hands and on your lips in Communion. He has made you new, for the kingdom of God has come to you in Jesus. And so, you now serve too. But here’s the thing – and this is really important and really the point when we talk about serving – the question is not *how*, but *who*?

So, don’t get hung up on the *how*, or on the *what*. For starting there leads to getting bogged down in things like how much time it takes, how much effort and energy are required, how much it costs, and whether I’m qualified to do it. The temptation, then, will be to do nothing at all. But as we’ve been hearing today, it’s not the *what* – it’s the *who*. The *what* may simply be putting on the kettle for the family on a week night. The *what* may be sending your kid off to begin study for the public ministry. Both are glorious when the *who* is the focus. It may be making sure your kid gets to youth group. It may be spending your vacation at one of our missions through WELS Kingdom Workers. Both are glorious when the *who* is the focus. The *what* may be a myriad of things, both small and great. The *what* will work itself out when the *who* is the focus. And the *who* is Jesus, the very One who gives all life and to whom each and every life is worth his life.

That’s the hidden glory of our good and gracious God. And that’s what this whole season of Epiphany is all about – the *who* of Christmas. That’s what we’ve see in Capernaum. That’s what we see here. Precious Jesus. Precious you. And there’s no place he’d rather be right now. And there’s nothing more important for him than you.

Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Almighty God, you sent your one and only Son as the Word of life for our eyes to see and our ears to hear. Help us believe what the Scriptures proclaim about him and do the things that are pleasing in your sight; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: [sung] **Amen.**

Prayers of the Church

For Epiphany, page 124

Special Prayers and intercessions:

- Karen Fuelleman, recovering from injuries and surgery.
- Marcia Oliver, recovering from injuries
- Phyllis Kapp, living out her days in your peace
- Betty Brailey, struggling with illness