

Epiphany 5B  
February 7, 2021  
Grace Lutheran Church  
Lakeland, FL

Isaiah 40:18-31  
Psalm 147  
1 Cor 9: 16-23  
Mark 1:29-39

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

The text for our consideration is this verse from today's Gospel: *And Jesus came and took her by the hand and lifted her up and the fever left her and she began to serve them. Mark 1:31*

The pace of things in the Gospel of Mark is rapid. In the first chapter, Jesus is baptized and **immediately** the heavens were torn apart as the Spirit like a dove descended, and **immediately** the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness for 40 days. Then Jesus returns to Galilee and calls the first four disciples who **immediately** drop what they are doing and follow him. **Immediately** they go into the synagogue on the Sabbath where Jesus taught as one with real authority. And **immediately** a man with an unclean spirit came in and Jesus rebuked that spirit and it came out of the man and he was made whole again. And all were amazed at what they were hearing and seeing. And Jesus was becoming quite the sensation throughout the whole region.

The pace in today's Gospel is no different. We hear that **immediately** upon leaving the synagogue Jesus goes to the home of Simon's mother-in-law. And here's where things get interesting – Jesus broke with the social norms and expectations and even the “rules” of the day. Even though he was an outsider to this family, he went to the woman – a woman he had not met before – and touched her taking her hand, lifted her up, and the fever left her and she began to minister to those in her home. Now, while we take aspirin or Tylenol or Advil for a fever and antibiotics to treat the underlying infection, in those days fevers often were deadly. Jesus saved this woman's life. The disease was cured. She was healed. Healed – made well – made whole. Not because of a magical incantation, not because of a prayer from afar. No. Made whole because of the touch of Jesus.

And, having been made whole, she springs into action. Our translations say that she “served” those present. Before we make much ado about how this serving by women for the benefit of men was appropriate to the time, it is important to recognize that the verb *her* – serving – is the same word that is used to describe what the angels, those powerful genderless beings, did for Jesus when he was in the wilderness for 40 days. The Greek word there is *diakonia* – from which we get our English word, “deacon” – one who helps, serves, ministers to the people of God with the hands and heart of Jesus.

Having been healed and made whole, she now was who she was created to be – one ministering to others. Not from a position of subservience but from a position of wholeness and health, she joined into Jesus' ministry in that time and in that place.

And Jesus' ministry was taking off in a big way – the Gospel-writer says that all who were sick or demon-possessed were brought to him and in fact the whole city was gathered at the door to the home of Simon's mother-in-law. And the disciples who had left their nets just a very short time ago were watching this, soaking it all in, and likely scratching their heads in amazement.

After a long day and night of work, Jesus went out for some alone time – time to pray, to rest, to be restored. But that was short-lived as the disciples hunted for him. Now, this hunting was not merely looking high and low to find him. No, this was hunting with an attitude. The Greek translated there almost always has a notion of hostility associated with it. Simon’s statement, “Everyone is looking for you,” might be understood as “Jesus! What’re ya doing?!! Everyone’s looking for you.” Two very different approaches to Jesus actions in their lives.

From the very center of who we truly are – people who have been called and washed and healed and made whole – from this center we respond to Jesus. And that response, my friends, is called vocation. We often speak of the call to ministry as a vocation – and it is. But it is not the only vocation – not the only area of service to which one is called. “Vocation” -- the same root as “vocal” – to call out. People often wrestle with what they are called to do. Many deny it or turn the other way. Others embrace it. Many are alert to that time when their vocation shifts or changes.

This is the best definition of vocation that I have heard – Fred Buechner says that vocation is where one’s greatest joy meets the world’s deepest need – the intersection of those two things – joy and need – is one’s vocation. And in the same way that an individual has a sense of vocation, of call, so too does a congregation. And also in the same way that an individual’s call may change over the course of their life, so too can a congregation’s call change over time.

Our mission is to share God’s love with each other, our community, and the world. Now, in the midst of pandemic and in the midst of the safety precautions we all are taking, the ways in which we share God’s love are different than a year ago. Where once we shared God’s love with each other in worship together and fellowship activities, now we have entered into the digital age and we share God’s love with emails and Zoom calls. We use the mail and email and the phone to communicate with each other perhaps in a more intentional way as we recognize the sense of isolation or even loneliness that we feel. Where once we went to various organizations or agencies in our community to lend a hand, we now focus more on gifts in kind or financial contributions. And as the pandemic has stricken our world, our participation with organizations such as Lutheran World Relief becomes even more important.

It is good for us to consider what new ways we might explore to live into our mission which actually is God’s mission for the world. How is it that we are called to serve? What are the greatest needs of the world around us? What gives us great joy? How have the answers to these questions shifted or changed over the years. What new thing may God be calling us to? What new thing is God doing in our midst?

*“And Jesus came and took her by the hand and lifted her up and the fever left her and she began to minister to them.”*

May it be so. Amen.