

## SERMON TEXT FOR EPIPHANY 5B

PREACHED FEBRUARY 4, 2018 AT ZION LUTHERAN, ENOLA PA

TEXTS: Mark 1.29-39; Isaiah 40.21-31, Psalm 147.1-11; 1 Corinthians 9.16-23

Throughout this season of Epiphany, we have been focusing on scripture texts that help us to answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" Today's gospel lesson will definitely add to that conversation. But before we get to that, I want to spend a few moments focusing on a similar question, one that I was assigned to write about in seminary: "Who is God?" Our Old Testament lesson from the prophet Isaiah answers this question quite nicely - and the choir did a lovely job of making this text come alive through song.

To put these verses in context, we need to know that while the Israelites were in slavery in Babylon, they began to lose hope that God would deliver them. They had lost their faith and began to worship other gods. So Isaiah was sent to remind them that, indeed, the God of Israel has not forsaken them. They have reason to be hopeful, for the one who will bring them to freedom is the God who created the world, the God who subdues the rulers of the earth and gives strength to those who are weary. Although the strongest of humans grow tired, God does not. God continues to act in liberating ways.

The last lines of Isaiah's prophecy are full of hope and are such a good reminder for us of what kind of God we have: *"but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."*

Speaking of a liberating God, we find this same kind of liberation in our gospel reading, where Jesus liberates Peter's mother-in-law and many others in the town of Capernaum from the grips of illness, disease and demon possession.

During these weeks of Epiphany, we have been making our way through the early verses of Mark's gospel, and things move quickly. We are only on the 29th verse, but already the gospel writer has told us about John the Baptist in the wilderness, Jesus' baptism by John in the River Jordan, Jesus' 40-day stint in the wilderness tempted by Satan, Jesus calling his first four disciples, Jesus making a stir with his teaching in the synagogue, and Jesus healing a man possessed by demons. As a result of these events, Mark records, *"At once [Jesus'] fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee."*

Today's gospel reading falls right on the heels of that statement. *"As soon as they left the synagogue [note that it was still the Sabbath], they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John."* We learn that Simon has a mother-in-law who is in bed with a fever. Jesus goes to her, takes her by the hand and lifts her up. Not surprisingly, the fever leaves her and she is restored to full health and wholeness, allowing her to provide hospitality to her family and guests.

But the day does not end there for Jesus. Soon the house and doorway are full of those who are sick or possessed with demons, and Jesus cures many and casts out many demons. Just a typical day for Jesus, we might guess.

Early the next morning, Jesus goes out to a deserted place for his morning devotions. But it doesn't take long for the disciples to realize that he is missing from the

house, and they go in search of him. When they find him, deep in prayer, Jesus informs them of their next step. *"Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the gospel there also, for that is what I came out to do."* And as he has done the previous 24 hours, Jesus goes throughout Galilee, *"proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons."* He challenges himself and his disciples to move outside of their comfort zone, from places and people they know to those who have yet to know Jesus.

In these opening verses of Mark's gospel, we are already getting a clear picture of who and what Jesus is. He is a teacher and healer. He is a man devoted to God and to a life of prayer. He recognizes the need to, at times, step away from the demands of the world and listen intently for God's voice to speak to him. He meets people where they are and brings healing and restoration to those who are hurting in body, mind, soul and spirit. And he recognizes the need to share his life and his teachings with his disciples (both male and female), for they would be the ones to witness to the whole world.

We, too, carry both the burden and the privilege of continuing Jesus' ministry. Whether it is a card or phone call or visit to a sick friend, a nutritious meal to one who hungers, helping to clean up after a natural disaster or a prayer prayed to our Triune God, we continue the legacy Jesus began in Galilee over 2000 years ago. And that may require that we, too, move outside of our comfort zone and do things and say things we've never done or said before - whether that is holding church events in a bar or a coffee shop, knocking on doors in the neighborhood, introducing ourselves to our neighbors and inviting them to join us at church, or simply sharing with a friend or co-worker how God makes a difference in our life.

The needs of the world can, indeed, be overwhelming. But Jesus knew that people needed to hear his message of love and grace, so he told the disciples, *"Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the gospel there also, for that is what I came out to do."* My friends, that is our mission today as well - to proclaim the gospel message to those who have yet to hear it, to bring healing and restoration to a hurting world. May we be faithful in our calling as disciples of Christ, knowing that we have an awesome God to guide us along the way. AMEN