

February 8, 2009

Epiphany 5

"The Everlasting Gospel Must Be Proclaimed"

MARK 1:29-39

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 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. This past week I was waiting at a stoplight on Main Street in Santa Maria. Crossing the street in the crosswalk was a young woman in her mid twenties, nicely dressed. Instead of walking she was crossing in one of those motorized scooters that elderly people use when they cannot walk. What tragedy came into her life that keeps her from walking, running, and engaging in sports as other young women might do who are her age? How would Jesus react to such human pain and suffering? We just heard how he reached out his hand with compassion to heal Peter's mother-in-law from a life threatening fever. We also heard how people came to Jesus with various diseases and he showed them love by healing them.

Because Jesus was fully human in addition to being true God, he was deeply affected by what he was able to do to help people. He saw the smiles on their faces when he healed them, the tears in their eyes, and the generous outpouring of thanks from the lips. Think of all the admiration and thanks that came to the pilot who safely landed the airplane on the Hudson River, even called the miracle of the Hudson. Jesus experienced an even greater appreciation and admiration for all his miracles. How easy it would have been to devote his entire ministry to performing such acts of kindness and love for people and even put aside the difficult job of proclaiming the gospel message to those who were lost.

So here we are ready to tackle another week on this earth to live for the Lord. So many opportunities to show love and kindness will present themselves before you again this week. In the midst of all these opportunities, there may also arise the difficult opportunity of speaking to someone in your family, your circle of friends or just a casual acquaintance about Jesus and how he has come to rescue us from eternal death and punishment. It is so much easier just to show love to people, put the sharing of the gospel on back burner so it never gets down. Today we want to speak about how **The Everlasting Gospel Must Be Proclaimed**.

Showing love to people is important

Jesus shows us by his example how important it is to show kindness and love to everyone who crosses your path. After worshipping with his disciples in the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus went to the home of Simon Peter and his brother Andrew. Sadness came to them because it says, "Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her." The Greek word used here for fever has the word fire in it. She was burning up with fever. There were no antibiotics to knock down the infection in those days. See the concerned looks on faces of the two brothers Peter and Andrew as they know that their mom is going to die. She does not have much longer to live.

It says that Jesus went to her. He had compassion on her and was deeply moved by the sadness that came to Peter and Andrew. That's our Jesus. He still has compassion on people today who get a bad report from their doctor, people who live each day with their bodies racked in pain, people who have just lost their jobs and those who cannot make their house payments. "What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and grief's to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. "No body knows the trouble I've seen. Nobody knows but Jesus." Listen again to these words we read from the book of Job. "Does not man have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man? Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me. When I lie down I think, 'How long before I get up?'" (Job 7)

Jesus went to her and then "he took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them." Did you catch that? The miracle took effect so quickly that she jumps of bed, goes into the kitchen and starts serving all the guests that have come to their house with Jesus. There is always the element of the spectacular in the miracles of Jesus. 5000 people are fed with five barley loaves and two small fish, and how many baskets were left over? (12) A man who never walked is healed and what does he do with his bed? (He walks and goes home) A man who never heard a word in his life because he was deaf, and never spoke a word plainly is healed by Jesus and what happens? He immediately begins to understand words he never heard before and even speaks them plainly. We get to pray to this same Jesus who sits at the right hand of God.

It didn't take long for the word to get out in the tiny town of Capernaum. That evening as the sun is setting (remember the Sabbath was over at sunset) the people starting bringing their friends and family members with various diseases to Jesus. If there was a little boy with a club foot, Jesus was able to heal it and make it straight so he could run with the best of them. And if there was a little girl born blind, Jesus could heal her and she could see and recognize objects she had never seen before. People even brought the demon possessed to Jesus. How awful it was to see someone overcome by powerful evil spirits, thrown down to the ground, foaming at the mouth, speaking horrible sounds. You didn't even want to be near someone like that. The evil spirits were no match for Jesus. He threw them out and would not even let them speak terrible blasphemous words.

Consider for a moment how special that evening was for Jesus. As we said at the beginning of our sermon Jesus is Lord and God, but he is also fully human. That meant he was tempted in all parts as we are, but still without sin. Can't you see the tears of joy in the eyes of Jesus as he helps these people, and as he sees them overwhelmed with gratitude? You cannot be that closely involved with helping people, especially children who are suffering, without feeling it deep in the pit of your stomach. Some of the best moments of your life

have come to you when you have been able to show people kindness and love. How easy it would have been for Jesus to let all these glorious moments fill his life and let it crowd out the all important work of preaching and teaching people the good news of how they are saved from eternal death and punishment through him.

How did Jesus handle this temptation to give up preaching the gospel and devote his ministry to acts of mercy and kindness? We are told, "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." We get the impression that Jesus often went to quiet places to be alone with his heavenly Father in prayer. It was not just in the desert or in the Garden of Gethsemane that Jesus fought against temptation. The book of Hebrews tells us, "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death."

What an example Jesus sets for us as we strive to keep our life in the right balance. I am holding a stick in my hand. It is hard to balance this stick if I just look at the bottom, but if I look at the top, I can keep it in the right balance. Jesus kept his whole life and ministry in the right balance. He saw people as sheep without a shepherd, destined for eternal death and punishment unless he rescued them. As Job said, "Life is but a breath." It is so short. When we read the Revelation we hear about a terrible place for the person who wants nothing to do with Jesus as his Savior. "He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb." The Shepherd yearned to get into the villages around the Sea of Galilee and bring the people who were lost home to him. Later he would define his ministry with these words, "The Son of Man is come to seek and save that which was lost."

Sharing the good news of salvation is most important

It is so quiet and peaceful in the early morning hours while it is still dark as Jesus prays to his Father. The sun is starting to break through the eastern sky. The quiet is broken by the frantic disciples who have been desperately searching for Jesus. Somewhat perturbed and upset they exclaim to Jesus, "Everyone is looking for you." At the first light of dawn the crowds have already gathered at Peter's home. They want to see more miracles of healing with all the emotion and excitement and joy that such healings brought. Jesus sets the agenda for the day, after spending hours with his Father in prayer. "Let us go somewhere else-to the nearby villages-so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."

Jesus did not lose sight of his main mission of reaching people who were lost. He sets the agenda for our congregations and for each of us in these last days. It is exciting to live your life for Jesus and take advantage of all the opportunity to show kindness and love. Galatians 6 says, "Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." There is a higher calling we have for our lives on this earth. 2 Corinthians 4 says, "We bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ." We find ourselves longing and yearning to have people see the dying of the Lord Jesus and his resurrection as the hope of their salvation. We are faced with the tough job of letting people know the truth of what is going to happen if they die without Jesus.

What was the outcome of Jesus preaching and teaching in the nearby villages? Did people come to him in large numbers? Later Jesus would tell the people of Capernaum, "And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

I wondered about that young lady crossing the street in her motorized scooter. Was she just temporarily unable to walk, or was this permanent? Has someone every talked to her about Jesus and his love for her and the blessings of eternal life that last forever? The Lord will give you opportunities to show kindness and love to people this week. Think of how many you can help with your prayers. Your greatest moments in life will come when you have the privilege of letting people know what Jesus has done to rescue them. The everlasting gospel must be proclaimed. Amen.