

**February 5, 2012**

**Epiphany 5**

*"Praying for People as Jesus Did"*

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**MARK 1:29-39**

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*As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. <sup>30</sup> Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. <sup>31</sup> So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. <sup>32</sup> That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. <sup>33</sup> The whole town gathered at the door, <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> Simon and his companions went to look for him, <sup>37</sup> and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" <sup>38</sup> Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else-- to the nearby villages-- so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." <sup>39</sup> 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.

What a joy it must have been for Jesus to heal people and see them get well immediately. So it happened with Peter's mother-in-law. She never made it to worship that day in the synagogue with Peter and Andrew and James and John. She was home with the flu, running a high fever, a bit under the weather, the English might say. Jesus comes into the house, takes her by the hand and raises her up. Her fever leaves her. She feels so good immediately that she heads to the kitchen to start serving a meal.

And then the people start coming. It is getting dark and they keep coming with their sick friends and family members. See the dad over there carrying his little blind boy. And over there is the man who broke his leg and it never did heal right. And there is the woman who is deaf. She never heard a sound in her life. And over there is a man who holds his demon-possessed brother, humped over, spitting, cussing and foaming at the mouth. They all go home healed by Jesus. Look at the joy on the face of Jesus as he helps people and sends them home so happy.

But now we look at the face of Jesus early in the morning, while it is still dark, where he is alone by himself praying to his heavenly Father. As Jesus prays we see concern written

all over his face as he asks the heavenly Father for help. I can almost hear him praying: "Please, Father, please Father, help me meet the challenges of this new day that is coming. Don't let me get trapped into spending all my time taking care of their problems of this life. Help me Father, please help me teach them how lost they are in their sin and how I have come to rescue them. The time is so short and these people need me as their Shepherd to rescue them and bring them back to you."

When it comes to helping people we pray the way Jesus did. We are so thankful the Lord allows us to live on this earth to help people, and show them kindness and love, and pray for them in their needs. How thankful we are to pray for people such as Dean and Lyn Buchanan during this difficult time in their lives. But then we also pray as Jesus did that our heavenly Father would always keep in front of us the important work of reaching out to the people are lost without Jesus and to those who are wandering away from him. We pray for what Jesus prayed that night in Capernaum as he asked his heavenly Father to help him reach more people more often with the good news that he is their Savior.

### **We get to help people with problems as Jesus did**

It is really an honor to help people with problems as Jesus did. Notice his concern for Peter's mother-in-law. "As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. 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 for "fire" in it. Perhaps there is someone you know who had a fever this past week, or the flu or a cold. Life is full of opportunities to help people going through problems and troubles within our families, in our congregation, and throughout our community.

Jesus sure did a good job of healing Peter's mother-in-law didn't he? I cannot help but smile when it says, "So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them." She felt so good immediately that she made one bee-line for the kitchen to help get food ready for Jesus, and the family and all those people who have come over to the house after the worship in the synagogue. This healing power of Jesus is still with us today as we go to Jesus in prayer for those who are sick and going through problems in life. "What a Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear!" Jesus invites to pray to our heavenly Father through him with these words, "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and the door with opened to you."

What happens next is no surprise. The people who have followed Jesus to Peter and Andrew's house immediately think of people they know and love who are also sick. They run to bring them to Jesus. Never mind that it is evening and the sun is setting. "That evening after sunset, the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out the many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was." Look at the joy on the face of Jesus as he holds a blind boy's face in his hands and opens the boy's eyes to see for the first time. The boy has felt his mother's face with his hands many times, and now he sees it for the first time. He cries, she cries, they all cry and even Jesus has tears of joy welling up in his eyes. And what a joy it was to cast out evil spirits and not even allow them to speak as they are being thrown out of the people they have afflicted.

Here is Jesus, the great Physician, the great healer, working the late shift, working to the point of exhaustion, loving every minute of the time that was given him to bring healing and help to so many people. Giving, helping, praying and serving people we love and people we hardly know is such a privilege. Taking care of my dad before he died, tired, exhausted, loving every minute of being able to care for someone who was always there for me. You were there, working the extra job to make enough for the house payments and to provide for the family. You sent the card, made the phone call, or wrote the e-mail that brightened up someone's day in a way that you never realized. Jesus found great joy in providing for people in need, and so have you. "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." Jesus had that joy in great measure and so have you.

### **We get to bring the gospel to people as Jesus did**

Could it be that such a wonderful blessing in our Savior's life could also be a source of major temptation? It was. Jesus knew what was coming the next day. There would be more people, more sickness and more demon possession. If today was busy, the next day would be even busier. There would be no time left to do what the Father had called him to do, to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. So Jesus did what he often did throughout his three years of ministry. He went to his Father in prayer. "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went to a solitary place, where he prayed." Yes, Jesus prayed to his heavenly Father, because he needed the help. Although he is God from all eternity, he is also fully human. He sets aside his power as God to even be tempted in all parts as we are. The temptation was real. Devote yourself to healing people. Forget about going from village to village and have people reject what you tell them about the kingdom of God. The temptation was real. Forget about going to the cross. Healing people is so much more exciting.

The disciples notice Jesus is gone. They search for him frantically. The first light of dawn is just breaking forth in the eastern sky and the crowds are already gathering for Jesus to provide more miracles of healing. Where is Jesus? Jesus is where he needs to be. He tells his disciples, "Let us go somewhere else- to the nearby villages- so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." And that is what Jesus did. "So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons."

I am holding in my hand a book called "Foreign Devil in Chain." It is the story of the life of L. Nelson Bell, the father-in-law of Billy Graham. He was a medical missionary in China in the early 1900's with the Presbyterian Church. In this book he describes how they set up a medical center for the Chinese which they also used to bring the message of the gospel to the people of China. L. Nelson Bell made it the policy that no Chinese person would receive medical treatment without hearing the good news about Jesus. In fact, he told his staff that if no one was able to witness to the person about Jesus, they were to contact him personally and he would make sure that person heard about Jesus.

The Lord our God allows us to do so many good things for people with the limited amount of time we have on this earth, but the best thing we can ever give someone is the good news about Jesus. That's what Job had going for him in his life. He knew about Jesus. In our first lesson we heard Job describe life on this earth as "hard service." He spoke

about “months of futility, and nights of misery” assigned to him. He shares how sick he was. “My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering.” He lost everything in his life. He lost his money, his kids, his health, the respect of his friends and the community and even his wife could not cope with Job’s distress and losses. He lost everything, but he did not lose Jesus. In the deepest dungeon of despair he says, “I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see him and not another. How my heart yearns within me.”

People need Jesus to be saved and spared from the wrath to come. This afternoon two great quarterbacks will battle it out for the Super Bowl. Who will come out on top the winner? Will it be Eli Manning or Tom Brady? Both of these men need to find something far more valuable than a Super Bowl ring. They need Jesus blood to wash them clean of their sin, and they need Jesus’ righteousness to cover them with a righteousness they can never find in themselves. A recent sale of stock could make Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook worth over 25 billion dollars and he is only 25 years old. Mark Zuckerberg needs Jesus if he is going to escape the punishment for sin that is coming on judgment day. I have relatives who don’t have Jesus and so do you. I have neighbors who don’t have Jesus and so do you. The Lord our God leaves us on this earth to take the good news of Jesus rescuing us when we were lost and share it with others who are lost. We bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ.” And so we pray with Jesus that he might use our lives to bring the good news about him to world full of people who are still lost and without hope. Amen.