

## **“Doing What You Are Called To Do”**

Epiphany 5, Year B

Isaiah 40:21–31, Psalm 147:1–11, 20c, 1 Corinthians 9:16–23, Mark 1:29–39

February 8, 2015

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen. The texts for this morning’s message are the lessons for this day.

Have you ever had people show up unexpectedly when you weren’t feeling well? That’s exactly what happens in today’s Gospel. Peter’s mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever when he came home from the weekly service at the synagogue. Oh, it wasn’t just Peter – he had Jesus and the new disciples with him. Hearing of her illness Jesus goes to her, takes her hand and she is healed. What happens next is not unexpected but certainly gave me pause. She immediately gets up and serves the guests.

Being healed she didn’t really need time to recover but immediately going about the task of hostess along with her daughter, well, there is something to be said for doing what you’re called to do. Living with her daughter and son-in-law leads me to believe she had no living son or she’d be living in his home and helping his wife raise her grandchildren. Instead she is in Peter’s home and being healed from her sickness gets up to do what she was called to do, serving the guests, including Jesus who’d healed her.

Once the sun had set on that Sabbath day things she saw even more wonders. Freed from the limitations of Sabbath rules about how far you could walk people began to bring all who were sick with various diseases and those with demons. Her own miracle fresh in her mind she witnessed more. Our Gospel writer, Mark, who always puts an emphasis on Jesus’ identity as the Son of God not being shouted out adds that Jesus did not let the demons He cast out speak so that they wouldn’t proclaim Him as Messiah. It was not yet time.

What it was time for Jesus to do was to “go on to the neighboring towns, (so that I may) to proclaim the message there also (that God’s Kingdom is near); for that is what I came out to do.”

Having been identified as the “beloved” at His baptism and now revealed as one who “preached with authority,” one who could heal the sick and cast out demons Jesus doesn’t rest on his laurels, either, like Peter’s mother-in-law He goes about the task He’s been called to do.

With the baptisms of two little ones today I couldn't help but think what ways God might call Eli and Colton to live out their baptismal faith – how they might be about God's work of proclaiming the Kingdom: salvation through Jesus Christ alone that is the work all of us share in the body of Christ, all of us together here in this congregation called Jehovah have been given the task of proclaiming as we gather around Word and Sacrament and are nurtured and stretched in faith in the fellowship of believers.

These are certainly “stretching times” in the faith community. For 20 years we've been easing into the post-Christian society times here in the United States. About 17% of the people in our neighborhood are actively involved in a Christian congregation – not just this Midway neighborhood but any neighborhood you live in. Oh, more Americans than any other large nation in the world claim Christianity as their faith – that is why many people throughout the world consider ours a Christian nation, but, truth be told, 17% are “Doing What We Are Called To Do.”

Surrounded by people who may be “spiritual” but not much into committing to their Christian faith it is as if few believe what we heard in the Psalm that tells us “***God determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.***” (Ps. 147:4) or what Isaiah, perhaps gazing into the vast Palestinian sky pondering the greatness of God wrote with Divine inspiration in our Old Testament lesson,

***Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? God sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. God stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. God brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing... Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? God who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name! Because of God's great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing!***

Not believing in the power of God – not living in holy wonder and awe at the greatness of our God many miss out on all that our God, who is near promises:

<sup>3</sup> He heals the brokenhearted  
and binds up their wounds.

<sup>4</sup> He, Who, determines the number of the stars  
and calls them each by name.

We, too, are called by name, belong to our God who longs for us to have His eyes not to disregard the lowly, the insignificant, the obscure or the unimportant. To those who are low and downcast Isaiah says, “your way is not hidden from God, for his might is matched by his tenderness. Unlike us, God never grows weary or tired; God’s empathy and understanding of our human frailties knows no boundaries.”

You, me, Isaiah we might get weary and weak, tired and faint - even vigorous youth will sometime struggle, stumble, and fall, "but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength" is God’s promise to us through Isaiah – we will have the strength we need to be about that which God has called us to do. Mid-winter is a time when many people wonder if their strength will ever be renewed. New Year’s resolutions shattered by the time Ground Hog’s Day rolled around last Monday. Real gym goers can finally get back into their routine after all the wanna-bes have slacked off. That new year – new life – new me...well, it was a nice thought! To really fulfill resolutions about any of our life, physical, intellectual, social or spiritual we have to place ourselves in new situations – face new obstacles.

It’s hard to go into “new towns” and not be changed by the journey or by the people and their circumstances once you get there. Paul, patterning his life after the life and ministry of Jesus said, “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.” People from all over the world have come to Saint Paul, Minnesota – people in need of the Gospel. One would think that with this happening all over the modern world churches in Europe and the United States would be filled with people changed by the Gospel and charged up to bring the Good News to others.

One Lutheran pastor wrote, recently “The turnaround of mainline churches will happen when we in those churches care as much about those outside the church as we do those inside. To embrace (those in need surrounding us) we will have to let go of survival. He posits that the problem is that those inside the church “trump outsiders every time” as we cater in all decisions to “what will please the card-carrying, bill-paying membership.” He continues, “time and again church leaders receive heat from insiders upset about this or that because they are trying to re-create a childhood church experience or simply have a rigid idea of church...Insiders are inherently change averse. People don’t like change...”

Only the Holy Spirit can change hearts to make change in change resistant people in any era. The disciples first met in the Temple until adversity and persecution scattered them to the ends of the earth. The church, in any age has not adapted to new realities until concern for those in need of the Gospel trumps appeasing those already in the church. As Reinhart states, “(the world) needs a church that so loves the world that she would die for it.” This raises the question, “how willing are we to change to be more effective in ministry here at Jehovah?”

God who called the heavens and earth into being – stretched the stars out in the sky – God’s power is at work among us, granting us renewed strength today and in the days to come – strength to change and eyes of love to see the world in need and do anything, even lay down our lives, so that they, too, might be saved. That is our task. May we always be found “doing what we are called to do.” AMEN

***Now may our everlasting God, who strengthens the weak and empowers the faint, make us His agents of healing and wholeness that the good news of Jesus reaches to the ends of the earth. AMEN.***