

The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.

Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Epiphany, Yr B

The Texts: Mark 1: 29-39; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

We've all had that loved one whom we have prayed earnestly to God for, to heal and to restore whatever it is they are suffering from. We do this because we don't want to see them suffer. Even though we know heaven is the paradise we all wait for, we don't want to go through the pain and grief of saying goodbye especially when the sickness is terminal, and the person has many more years they could live in this world and enjoy the company of their family. We know that God has the power and authority to bring about a miraculous healing and so we pray to him to heal and remove those things that cause us grief. Like Paul our faith tells us to die is gain, but to live is Christ. To praise and give glory to God in all circumstances.

The opening sentence in the Gospel of Mark reads: "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The gospel is that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Jesus is the one who has come to open the door to the kingdom of heaven. There is no evil or suffering in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is the Son of God; he has the power of God, because he is God. While the people were fascinated in Jesus and this new teaching he proclaimed, they were attracted to the power he had to heal and restore. Everyone saw Jesus as a quick fix to their problems.

Jesus was kept busy that night, for the whole town had gathered at the door, and he healed many who had various diseases. If Jesus was here in our town, would you be among the crowd at the door? However, Jesus did more than come to heal sickness and throw out demons. Jesus came to deal with the source of all sickness and evil that inflicts our lives. Jesus came to deal with our mortality and the evil that separates us from the kingdom of heaven. Even if you are miraculously cured of a terminal illness, or healed of back injury, whatever it is you asked to be cured from, the fact remains we are still mortal and are going to die of something. We will still get sick from something. We still have trouble in our lives from sinful thoughts and desires of our own and those around us. We still need to be cured of sin where the wages of sin is death. We are not meant to live forever in bodies subject to sin and decay.

That's what Jesus teaches his disciples when they can't find him in the morning and everyone is looking for him. Jesus did not go back to that crowd, he said, "let's go somewhere else, to the nearby villages, so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."

Jesus came to preach the good news that in him is salvation from the sin that separates us from God. That is the good news that we as a church, the body of Christ are called to proclaim. Yes, we pray for healing and restoration in Jesus' name and allow Jesus to act according to his will, but we also proclaim that in Jesus is everlasting healing from sin, death, and the power of Satan.

Jesus also teaches something else very important today. Where was Jesus when the disciples found him? He had gone off to a solitary place to pray. Jesus is teaching us we need to pray. We need a spiritual retreat to be replenished spiritually for the work that is before us. We need to talk to God and seek his help and guidance in all that we do as church. You can't give out spiritually unless you are refilled spiritually.

Once we have prayed and had that quiet time with God then we are spiritually prepared to go and proclaim the good news about Jesus.

We heard the Apostle Paul say he was called and compelled to preach the gospel. As Christians, we are called to share the good news about Jesus. Like Paul we come along side people to win as many as possible.

Paul gives several important principles to win people. Paul said he became all things for all people for the sake of the gospel. That doesn't mean you let go of your Christian values.

It means you find a common ground with those you talk to. Really that shouldn't be too hard, as you get to know those you work with, or your friends as they confide in you about their struggles. You can simply share how you find strength and comfort in knowing Jesus is with you in your life. Even pray with them as the opportunity arises.

As a church, it means finding a common ground with each other. How keen are we to make connections with each other, with those we haven't seen for a while? Paul was about making people feel accepted. As a congregation, are we sensitive to each other's needs and concerns?

Paul always looked for opportunities to tell others about Jesus. Each of us have been filled with the Spirit at our baptism. Jesus gives what we need to be equipped to share the gospel. He also shows what is needed. Part of being equipped is to spend time in prayer, and quiet time with Jesus. Be filled spiritually yourself with God's word.

To be a disciple of Jesus does not mean we rely on our own ability until we become exhausted and run out of enthusiasm. We can't win people for the sake of the gospel if we are running low spiritually. Rather like Paul, Jesus wants us to share in the blessings of the gospel being proclaimed.

As a church what does this look like?

We look for ways to invite people to know Jesus. We continue to support our young ones and find ways to support them in their faith. We find out one another's needs to support each another in our faith journey.

As soon as we feel negative about becoming all things for all people, it's a good sign we need to retreat, spend time in prayer and be filled with the Spirit. Jesus took time to retreat and it is a good model for us to follow. Because the task is never finished until Jesus returns, to proclaim the good news that in Jesus is complete healing of body and soul that lasts into eternity. Amen.