



## Liturgical Day: The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Date: February 8, 2009

Sermon Title: More than a Healing

the fever left her  
Jesus' gracious healing touch  
all through Galilee

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Simon Peter's mother-in-law was sick. Not just feeling punk. She was desperately sick. St. Mark tells us that she was on fire with fever. You can imagine, in a time before hospitals, antibiotics, penicillin, and the like... it was a very serious condition. The village had seen others come down with a fever as hot as hers. The village had buried most of them. They were concerned about Peter's mother-in-law. They were worried that she might not make it.

So it is no surprise that the minute Jesus entered the house, they immediately shared with him their concern about her. Earlier that day Jesus had driven an unclean spirit out of a man in the synagogue. The people knew Jesus had healing power. And they hoped he would be able to use that power with her. They brought Jesus in to where she was lying in bed. Much to their delight, Jesus quickly restored her to health. She got out of bed feeling so well that she once again began to play her accustomed role in the household: she went about caring for the guests who had gathered there.

Let's pay attention to how St. Mark describes what Jesus did for her. In St. Matthew's Gospel, Jesus touches her hand, and the fever leaves her. In St. Luke's Gospel, Jesus stands over her, and rebukes the fever, and it leaves her. But here in Mark's Gospel, Jesus takes her by the hand, and he *lifts her up*. ἤγειρεν is the word Mark uses. ἤγειρεν – Jesus lifts her up. Mark uses the same word here that he will use in the sixteenth chapter, when a young man says to Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome on that first Easter morning: "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. *He has been raised*; he is not here." [St. Mark 16:6]

What does it mean that the same word used for Jesus' resurrection is used for this woman's return to health? St. Mark uses this word to show us that Jesus was no simple faith healer. There were plenty of those in the first century: people who were medical magicians, wandering from town to town, offering cures and ointments. They were remarkable individuals. But Jesus was not one of them. His agenda was far greater than that. Jesus had come, not just to heal a few sick people, and rid them of their diseases. He came to restore the faithful to the relationships they were intended to have with God and with one another. He came to offer new life to all the world. He came to do battle with the brokenness in this world, a brokenness that causes people to be estranged from one another. A brokenness that causes people to be alienated, isolated, and alone.

And so Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law. Quite likely, he saved her life. Without his intervention, her fever may well have taken its toll, and Peter and the others would once again have to make that long, lonely trip to the cemetery on the edge of town. Jesus healed her, and saved her friends and relatives the pain of bidding farewell to her at a far-too-young age. But he did more than that. Jesus did more than heal this woman. You see, the fever had taken more from her than her health and her

FIRST LESSON

ISAIAH 40:21-31

PSALM

PSALM 147:1-11, 20C

SECOND LESSON

1<sup>ST</sup> CORINTHIANS 9:16-23

GOSPEL LESSON

ST. MARK 1:29-39

PRAYER OF THE DAY

EVERLASTING GOD, YOU  
GIVE STRENGTH TO THE WEAK  
AND POWER TO THE FAINT.  
MAKE US AGENTS OF YOUR  
HEALING AND WHOLENESS,  
THAT YOUR GOOD NEWS  
MAY BE MADE KNOWN TO  
THE ENDS OF YOUR CREATION,  
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, OUR  
SAVIOR AND LORD. AMEN.

9300 E. BELLEVIEW AVE.  
GREENWOOD VILLAGE,  
COLORADO 80111

VOICE

(303) 770-9300

FAX

(303) 770-9301

WEB

WWW.STPLC.ORG



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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strength. It had taken away her ability to be a mother to her daughter and the rest of the family. It had taken away her ability to use her gifts in a way that gave her meaning and purpose. It had taken away her ability to enjoy life and family and love. Her fever had not only made her sick. It had removed her from society. It had isolated her. It had placed her in a tomb where, at least until she might get better, she was already as good as dead.

From that lonely state, Jesus lifted her. He restored her to the role she was accustomed to playing in her world. He removed the walls that had grown up between her and those who were well. He renewed that family, and allowed them to live and love as God intended them to do. Jesus was far more than a faith healer. He was far more than a snake oil salesman. He was ministering among them in a way that brought restoration and renewal. And by raising up Peter's mother-in-law, he both offered them a foretaste of his own resurrection, and gave them a glimpse of what their work as his representatives in this world would become.

What would the work of the church look like, if we took seriously the call to continue this ministry that Christ began in the first century? What would it be like if we, as the body of Christ, dedicated ourselves to healing ministries that restored people's well being – people's relationships with God and with one another? I can think of two examples: one in our back yard, and one half-way across the world.

The one in our back yard (so to speak) is Saint Peter's Stephen Caregiving Ministries. This is a ministry that has been a part of our life together for more than a decade. Through Stephen Ministries, we are able to have a healing presence in the lives of those who are in a time of difficulty or transition. A Stephen Minister is one who will meet with you on a regular basis – often once each week or once each month. A Stephen Minister is one who will listen to you, and seek to understand you, and be with you in a challenging time. A Stephen Minister is one who will pray with you and pray for you, and invoke the healing power of God into your life's journey. And often times, a Stephen Minister is one of the means by which God makes you well again, and allows you to once again be the person God has called you to be. I am so thankful for our Stephen Ministers, and it is a joy for me to hear stories about the ways God has moved through them to bring the gifts of restoration and renewal to those who receive care from them.

The second example – the one that is located half-way across the world – is Selian Lutheran Hospital, near Arusha Tanzania. This remarkable health-care ministry has been a vehicle of God's healing grace for more than thirty years now. It is located in an area where there are precious few medical facilities. People come from miles around to receive care for their illnesses. But what intrigues me about the people at Selian Hospital is the way that they do more than just fix up bodies. They work with young children, whose legs have become twisted and crippled by poor water sources. These children, who haven't been able to run and play with their friends for months or years, are restored, and able to once again join in with the others in play. They work with women who have been injured in childbirth. Some of them become incontinent, and because of that are ostracized from their families. But a simple medical procedure addresses that infirmity, and restores these women to their families. They work with families where people are dying from aids. Through their hospice ministries, they heal hearts and souls, and help families to stay strong in faith and love. Selian is a hospital which understands that many occasions of physical illness are opportunities to bring restoration and renewal into the lives of their patients.

Jesus took Peter's mother-in-law by the hand and raised her up. In raising her up, he did more than make her feel better: he restored her life. He made it possible, once again, for her to be the person God intended her to be: a mother, a mother-in-law, a friend, a gracious hostess. As we consider what it means to live our lives in the shadow of his example, we have to ask ourselves how it is that we find opportunity to be agents of new life in our world. How do we respond to brothers and sisters in this congregation who may be suffering from brokenness and isolation?

We worship a God who has the power to raise that which is dead, and restore it to what it was intended to be. When we are broken by sin's effects, God's grace raises us up, and restores us as children of faith. When bad health or other afflictions separate us from one another, God's grace raises us up, and restores our relationships with one another.

Take us by the hand, Lord Jesus. Raise us to be the kind of people who participate in your work of bringing restoration and renewal to this world. Fill us with your gifts of hope and faith and joy. And work through us to heal division, fight exclusion, and cause grace to flourish. Grant that we might live on this earth as a sign of your presence and power.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (February 8, 2009)

English Text: <sup>i</sup>

<sup>1:29</sup> As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. <sup>31</sup> He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. <sup>32</sup> That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. <sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered around the door. <sup>34</sup> And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. <sup>35</sup> In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup> And Simon and his companions hunted for him. <sup>37</sup> When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." <sup>38</sup> He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." <sup>39</sup> And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons. <sup>ii</sup>

Greek Text:

<sup>1:29</sup> Καὶ εὐθὺς ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς ἐξεληθόντες ἦλθον εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν Σίμωνος καὶ Ἀνδρέου μετὰ Ἰακώβου καὶ Ἰωάννου. <sup>30</sup> ἡ δὲ πενθερὰ Σίμωνος κατέκειτο πυρέσσουσα, καὶ εὐθὺς λέγουσιν αὐτῷ περὶ αὐτῆς. <sup>31</sup> καὶ προσελθὼν γειρεν αὐτὴν κρατήσας τῆς χειρὸς καὶ ἀφήκεν αὐτὴν ὁ πυρετός, καὶ διηκόνει αὐτοῖς. <sup>32</sup> Ὀψίας δὲ γενομένης, ὅτε δυὸ ἄλιος, ἔφερον πρὸς αὐτὸν πάντα τοὺς κακῶς χοντας καὶ τοὺς δαιμονιζομένους <sup>33</sup> καὶ ἦν λη ἡ πόλις ἐπισυνηγμένη πρὸς τὴν θύραν. <sup>34</sup> καὶ ἐθεράπευσεν πολλοὺς κακῶς χοντας ποικίλαις νόσοις καὶ δαιμόνια πολλὰ ἐξέβαλεν καὶ οὐκ φειν λαλεῖν τὰ δαιμόνια, ὅτι ἤδεισαν αὐτόν. <sup>35</sup> Καὶ πρῶτῃ νυκτὶ ἀναστὰς ἐξῆλθεν καὶ ἀπῆλθεν εἰς ῥημον τόπον κακεῖ προσήχητο. <sup>36</sup> καὶ κατεδίωξεν αὐτὸν Σίμων καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ, <sup>37</sup> καὶ εὗρον αὐτόν καὶ λέγουσιν αὐτῷ τι πάντες ζητοῦσιν σε. <sup>38</sup> καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς γωμεν ἀλλαχοῦ εἰς τὰς ἐχομένας κωμοπόλεις, ἵνα καὶ ἐκεῖ κηρύξω εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ ἐξῆλθον. <sup>39</sup> Καὶ ἦλθεν κηρύσσων εἰς τὰς συναγωγὰς αὐτῶν εἰς λην τὴν Γαλιλαίαν καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια ἐκβάλλων. <sup>iii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at [http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church\\_year/lectionary.html](http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church_year/lectionary.html).

<sup>ii</sup> St. Matthew 16:13-19, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

<sup>iii</sup> St. Matthew 16:13-19, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).