

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt  
 Fifth Sunday after Epiphany - Year B  
 St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
 Isaiah 40:21-31  
 Psalm 147:1-11, 20c  
 I Corinthians 9:16-23  
 Mark 1:29-39  
 02/04/2024

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

29As soon as [Jesus and the disciples] left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. 32That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34And 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. 35In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." 38He 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." 39And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

The Gospel of Our Lord

### **Prayer**

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

### **Faithful Trust**

*This is an updated version of a sermon I gave for this text in 2021.*

Good morning! Every fall break at Wheeling Jesuit University a group of students would travel down to the heart of Appalachia in West Virginia to chop and split wood for a group of nuns who lived on a land trust. In coal

country this piece of land stood in defiance of those who wanted to take its resources. The nuns did a lot of education for the local community. They also provided a place for retreats and education on mountain top removal. And come winter, they would need some firewood to heat the houses they called home. So that's where we came in.

It was our job to collect, split, organize, and stack the wood that had been cut down. So, we would get up bright and early and after a hearty breakfast cooked by the wonderful sisters, we would get to work. And man was it work! We would climb around the woods finding what had been cut down, rolling the logs to the road where we would load them onto trucks. Others would run the log splitters, stacking and piling up the firewood. Others might be working on little projects around the property, and some would be splitting the wood with mauls. When it was all done, it went back into the trucks to be taken to the log piles near each house where it was taken back out of the truck and stacked neatly where it waited for the eventual cold weather.

I was no stranger to manual labor, but man was that some hard work. My then girlfriend Megan had been on the trip the year before, and convinced me to tag along too. I was keen to show off my strong work ethic, but it was clear to me that this crazy girl who yelled at me when I tried to help her had a servant's heart. By the end of the trip, we were all ready for some rest, most of us exhausted from our time with the sisters, who worked harder than all of us. It was tough... but man was it rewarding. We spent time in God's wonderful creation, serving others and forming our own little community, if only for just a few days.

We see similar stories in our Gospel lesson and second reading. Both speak of hard work, not for any reward, but out of joy and service for a God who has given us a purpose.

But before we can continue, we must speak to the ways these readings have been abused. Both of these readings have been mis-used by some looking for a way to subjugate others. The Gospel reading has been twisted by some as a way to tell women that they should always serve men. Our reading from I Corinthians has also been twisted as proof for why forced slavery is ok. Let me be clear: those interpretations are never acceptable. Simon Peter's mother-in-law is restored, her immediate work helps to show

the extent to which she has been healed. Paul in his letter to Corinth willingly CHOOSES to serve.

So, with that out of the way, let us turn back to our texts. Specifically, the Gospel. This is technically the first healing in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus has called the first disciples, taught in the synagogue, cast out demons, and now turns to restoring others to the community. St. Peter's mother-in-law is sick. (Which is a reminder that Peter was married, that the disciples were established members of their community.) Osvaldo Vena points out that *"the fact that the first person to be healed in the story is a woman is significant. It shows that from the very beginning Jesus sided with the least of society... The positive message of this healing, and the other cures in Mark 1, is that they represent Jesus' ideology of inclusion: those healed are incorporated back into society. Simon's mother-in-law returns to her role as a woman in the society of the time."*<sup>1</sup> It's not about the role of women, but about the restoration of a people in need of God's love and healing. The woman responds to God's work by serving. The change is dramatic. She has gone from being near to death all the way to bustling work all in a short time. A people with no hope are given direction once again.

I don't know about you, but it's pretty easy to feel like there is no hope. You don't need to have a mental illness to feel like the world has beaten us down lately. The Gospel lesson today reminds us that our God has the power to restore all of us to community. And unlike the rest of us, God never gets tired! And if you ever need a reminder of how great our God truly is, just take a listen to the words from our first reading:

*"27Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God"?28Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. 29He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. 30Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; 31but those who wait for the Lord shall renew*

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-after-epiphany-2/commentary-on-mark-129-39-5>

*their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”<sup>2</sup>*

It’s a wonderfully powerful passage that’s even more impressive when you find out the details behind the story. While we know the book of Isaiah as one whole story, it’s most likely written by at least 3 different authors at 3 major points in the history of Israel. What is originally called “First Isaiah” takes place before Babylon comes along and destroys Jerusalem. “Second Isaiah” starts with chapter 40, our reading today, and is written during their exile. The Jewish people have been carted off to all different parts of the world, and yet the author is still able to express this wonderful passage of trust and belief in God.

Even in the midst of darkest despair the author marvels at the majesty and power of our God. This is a being so powerful that nothing slows God down. Nothing is impossible for the Lord. From saving the entire nation of Israel to healing one woman by the hand of Jesus Christ, it’s all possible. So as we look forward to the future, remember that, and dream big... Because God can certainly do it. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 40:27-31 NRSV