

## **Fifth Sunday After Epiphany B      Mark 1:29-39    “Journey With Jesus: Healing for Body and Soul”**

The receptionist answers the phone in the doctor’s office, listens awhile, says goodbye and hangs up. She tells the doctor, “That was Mr. Schmidt from Red Bud. Since he believes that God healed him of his illness, he is sending the money for your bill to his church at St. John’s Lutheran.” While we should not stiff our physicians of the money they rightly deserve from us, this short story highlights a truth that any worthwhile doctor would echo, that is, medicine and medical professionals treat people, but God is the one who heals sickness.

In today’s Gospel reading we see God’s Son living in human flesh, Jesus the Christ, healing people of what is bothering their bodies. But there is an even more destructive spiritual sickness that makes each of us deathly ill every day. Through the preaching of God’s Word Jesus heals us who are sick in and possessed by our sins.

### **I.      “Everyone Is Looking for You”**

#### **A. We Tend to Seek Jesus Only in Times of Trouble**

If the events of this passage would have happened today, Jesus’ disciples might have seen themselves as the Board of Directors of the new “Jesus Ministries Incorporated.” They might have encouraged Jesus to form His own television network, develop a website, start a Facebook page, build an international headquarters, and market a line of “Jesus the Healer” merchandise. After all, as they say, “everyone is looking for You, Jesus.” But why are they? It is for what they can get out of Him.

So also it is with us. We tend to turn to Jesus only for our physical or emotional benefit, especially in times of trouble. We only call upon Jesus when we are sick for sometimes God has to put us flat on our back to get us to look up to heaven. “Pastor, if God gets me through this surgery, I will be in church every Sunday.” Ten years later I’m still waiting for the first time to happen. Or it takes financial trouble, going flat broke, before we realize that all

we have comes from God and really belongs to Him. Or the nation has to face an external threat with war as a possibility before we really believe that “In God We Trust.”

Within two weeks after I was ordained in 1990 Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and American troops were mobilized and sent to Saudi Arabia for a planned invasion of Iraq. Rumors spread of 10,000 body bags being ordered by the Pentagon. Families of soldiers gathered with military veterans in support groups. An older pastor of another Christian denomination who had begun his ministry at the end of World War II told me, “We need a good war to get people back into church.” Well, the threat of a war did get people into church for awhile in the fall of 1990. When the actual invasion happened and ended quickly with little loss of American lives, that bump in worship participation was short-lived as well. We saw the same thing happen after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. For three months people were in church who didn’t normally attend, but over time they fell back into their prior lack of participation. When times are tough, we turn to God for help, but when life is going well we say, “Jesus who? Things are good. I don’t need Him now.”

### B. Our Sin Troubles Us Every Day

But every day of our lives we face an unseen trouble that threatens us with far worse consequences than even sickness, poverty or war. That trouble is our complete separation from God. That separation is caused by our own rebellion against God’s holy will for our lives. That separation stems from our rejection of God’s good ways for our benefit. That separation starts with our natural hatred of God’s presence in our world and in our lives. Because of that separation we deny that we have any responsibility or accountability to God.

We not only want, but we expect God’s blessings in our lives, but at the same time we refuse to follow His will, demanding to live this life our own selfish way. It is this sin that separates us from our Creator, from one another, and from doing that which is good and right. Ultimately, our sin separates us from life itself.

## II. “I Have Come to Preach”

### A. Jesus Defeats Diseases

There are three types of miracles that Jesus performed during His earthly ministry: nature, healing and exorcisms, the driving out of demons. Eighth graders, that question will be on your next confirmation test. Let's first focus on healing, the restoring of health to the bodies of those burdened by sickness or handicap. Such things were not part of God's original creation, but now run rampant in a world stained by humanity's rejection of God's holy will.

Jesus' healing of physical bodies is a visible sign of a greater spiritual restoration, an earthly example of the wholeness that He will give us in heaven. Though Jesus has ascended to prepare that place for us, His healing of our bodies here still continues. He works faith in us to believe in Him as our Savior from sin by means of His Word and Sacraments. Jesus also works healing and health in our physical lives through the earthly means of doctors, nurses, medicine, technology and therapy.

### B. Jesus Defeats Demons

Now to the exorcisms, the driving out of evil spirits from the people they possessed. How is it that Jesus came across so many demon-possessed people? He really should have picked a better neighborhood for His earthly ministry! There are a couple of explanations. First, much of what are termed psychological or medical disorders today are problems that 2000 years ago were attributed to demon-possession. I think that, in some cases, theirs may be the better understanding of the problem.

Second, when the presence of God appears in such a powerful way as it did in the person of Jesus, it smokes the demons out of their hiding place, they have no choice but to come out and make themselves known. In freeing these people from their total slavery to the devil Jesus displays the power that He exercised in our own lives when He snatched us from the devil's grip and claimed us as His very own in the water and word of our holy baptism.

### C. Jesus Defeats Death

As good as healing sick people and driving out demons is, there is even more that Jesus comes to do. He is here to preach, to proclaim God's Word, God's forgiveness, God's love and life in God's kingdom. But for these gifts of God to be ours Jesus has to do more than just talk, He has to act. The Son of God living in our human flesh had to take on that enemy which humanity cannot defeat, death. As a sinless sacrifice upon the cross, Jesus died our death. But the grave's victory over Him was brief. Jesus has risen from the dead. He has conquered death for us. In His name and by His power, we, too, will rise from our graves to live with Him eternally.

### III. Jesus Heals Us So That We Can...

#### A. Serve Others

One person who is specifically mentioned as being healed by Jesus is Simon Peter's mother-in-law. She has a fever. Those who have had the flu lately can sympathize with that problem. At that time and in that place, though, a fever was a common symptom of an even worse disease like malaria or typhoid fever. A person's temperature could reach 104-105 degrees. It caused death in one out of every four people who had it. The family members of this woman see the handwriting on the wall. They fear the worst for their loved one.

That is, until Jesus comes to be a guest in her house. He takes her by the hand and the fever has to let go of her immediately. This was not a gradual strengthening process. She was not just on the road to recovery, take it easy for a few days and you will get better. No, she receives complete and instant healing. In fact, she feels so much better that right away she resumes her responsibility as household hostess.

We might say, "Thanks for nothing, Jesus, now I have to go back to work." But that is what this woman wants to do, it is her life calling. Jesus heals us of our sin so that we, too, can serve Him and others. Recovered from our sickness of sin, we have our own responsibilities to attend to, supporting the work of His church, praising Him in regular worship, reading and studying His Word, the Holy Bible, and helping those who are in need that He places before us.

## B. Speak About Him

The result is different with the other type of miracle that Jesus does in our text, driving out of demons. He does not let those demons speak about Him because they know who He is. Having them testify about Jesus is like having a mafia boss endorse a presidential candidate. What he says may be good, but where it comes from is bad. What is more, Jesus wants His own words and actions to convince people that He is the Holy One of God, rather than them hearing it from evil spirits. Jesus first needs to fulfill His mission of death and resurrection to show us what it means for Him to be our Savior. In addition to that, Jesus has much better witnesses of who He is than those demons. He has us. What Jesus commands the evil spirits not to do is what He calls upon us to do for Him, that is, to tell others that He is the Son of God, the Lord of our lives and our Savior from sin.

We are among the sick people that Jesus makes healthy. We are among the demon-possessed people that Jesus has freed. Our sin made our spirits sick. The devil possessed our lives. Then Jesus claimed us as His own chosen children. Healthy and free now we serve our Lord Jesus. We do so by leading other spiritually sick and possessed people to the same healing that Jesus has for them. In His name, Amen.