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February 4, 2018 – 5th Sunday after Epiphany

Text: Mark 1:29-39

Jesus Heals Many

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Jesus Prays in a Solitary Place

³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

³⁸ Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

After last week's reading, where Jesus is teaching in the synagogue and casting out a demon, we have this little interlude. He then goes off to do what many of us do after church in the morning. We take a little time to relax and enjoy the day. In this case he and his disciples go to Peter's house. We don't really know anything about Peter's personal life, but we find out here he's married. Peter tells Jesus about his mother-in-law who seems to be ill. The fact that no one mentioned her illness to Jesus earlier tells us they have a long way to go in understanding what Jesus is all about, but it's still very early in Jesus ministry.

Jesus doesn't have to exert himself much to deal with this minor problem, but he is glad to be able to help and he takes care of her. It seems they relaxed for the day and then other sick people came to visit so Jesus could heal them as well. Jesus tends to their ailments and then, after taking some time for himself in prayer, declares to the disciples that he must continue on to preach and heal in other towns.

Jesus is the quintessential preacher. As we heard last week, Jesus preaches with authority. No one can contradict him when it comes to God's word. Every time someone tries to trip him up with some nuance from Scripture, Jesus always out smarts them. It's not a case of who is wiler. Jesus understands the will of God perfectly and the Pharisees and priests in

general never do. They try to trick him with words they don't even understand.

As a preacher myself, I went to seminary for four years to get my masters. Three of those years were just school work. The seminary gives its students a wide sampling of Biblical teachings and instructs us on ways to apply it, such as in preaching. Even with that, I'll never be the preacher Jesus was. No pastor can hope to measure up. Even with all of my seminary education, I'm still just scratching the surface of theology and all of the ways it speaks to our lives today. I can never speak on my own authority, not like Jesus does. I am not God and do not have perfect knowledge of God's will.

But Jesus isn't done. Not only does he perfectly understand God's will and how to apply it to your life, he knows you better than you know yourself. There are numerous places in the Gospels where Jesus speaks to people and tells them exactly what they need to hear, whether they want to hear it or not. He chastises those who are confident in their own righteousness and he proclaims forgiveness to those who know they have none. He never makes a mistake there. His words are always perfect. Those he speaks to may not listen, but no one can blame him for not understanding what their needs are. He is always sure of what he says and who he says it to.

Even if you had all of the theological training the world can provide and even if you could as eloquently as the notable preachers the world has ever had, you still wouldn't be able to do what Jesus does. We can't even claim a perfect knowledge of ourselves, much less anyone else. If you were to preach a message, you end up in the situation every pastor is well acquainted with, never really knowing whether the message was received by your hearers the way it was intended, or whether it was received at all.

St. Paul says in Romans, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

The intention is that we join Jesus in preaching the Gospel. It makes for a very daunting task though. Even for pastors with special training it's difficult. Even more so when you have spent years at the seminary studying all of this stuff. It's worth pointing out that the word Jesus uses here isn't really meant to refer to preaching like I'm preaching now. Though preaching as pastors do has a special place in the church, it isn't what Jesus is talking about it. Jesus isn't referring to this. He means something more casual, more conversational. Just sharing the good

news of salvation and forgiveness. Not something that requires many years at seminary. Not something that needs you to be able to put together a long message ahead of time like pastors do when they get up to preach. Just to be able to talk to people about Jesus. Perhaps it is easier to use words like “proclaim” or “share.”

That lightens the burden a bit. You don’t have to do all of that prep work when telling someone about Jesus. But, when Jesus has enough trouble getting through to people, how are any of the rest of us expected to do any better? You could step back and look at people like the prophets, since they were made a living proclaiming God’s word. That doesn’t go a whole lot better though. Even Moses, the prophet who set the standard for every prophet since, was worried about not being able to speak God’s word. If Moses himself doesn’t feel up to the task, it doesn’t bode well for the rest of God’s people.

That’s usually about where the thought process stops, if it even gets that far. “It’s too hard. I don’t know what to say. I won’t be any good at it. It won’t make any difference whether I do it or not.” All of those and more are common reasons why proclaiming God’s word isn’t too high on anyone’s list of things to do. It just seems like something that’s far more likely to cause anger and frustration than do anything productive. Why waste your time on something that is just going to make everyone mad? I have so many other, more useful, things to do. If we even think about it all that much. It’s just as likely our thought process stops at, “I just don’t have any interest in that,” and we don’t think about it anymore.

It’s an indication of how selfish we are that a command from God to go and share his word with others carries so little weight with us. If someone calls us to account for our angry outbursts, our miserly hoarding of material wealth, our gossiping and busybody behavior, we might be inclined to try and reform our ways and express remorse to those we’ve affected. Point out that we aren’t sharing God’s word like we should and the best we’ll manage is to look a little sheepish and mutter something needing to do better, or we just ignore it altogether. God’s word doesn’t overflow from us into the lives of others because we simply don’t pay it much attention. God’s command to us just isn’t very important and his desire to save others just doesn’t interest us.

Our excuses might be reasonable if God’s word actually depended on us to be effective. We are just the messengers. God does all of the heavy lifting. Proclaiming God’s word is as much for us as it is for those we speak to. God wants us to be willing and caring enough to share

his word with others, he wants us to care for the wellbeing of others. He wants us to share his love.

Which is why this passage in Mark teaches us something else as well. Jesus' work in preaching and sharing his word is rarely just a matter of talking. Jesus helps others any way he can. Preaching, teaching, healing, caring, comforting, all of these are more than just helping people out, they are sharing the love of God with others. For Jesus, caring and proclaiming went hand in hand. People did need to hear their sins were forgiven, but they also needed to know they were loved, so Jesus showed them how much they were loved.

Jesus is in Capernaum. He goes to the synagogue and probably does some of what we would call preaching. He opens the Bible and starts talking about what it says and how it applies to their lives. Then he goes on to heal and care for the people there. All of these things he does to put right what sin has made wrong. Every person who comes to him, whether it's out of guilt over past sins, a need for healing, out of sorrow for the death of someone close to them, or whether it's simply a desire to learn more about God, each is a person whose life has been broken by sin. No one is supposed to have sin in their lives. No one is supposed to be hurting. No one is supposed to feel sorrow over death because no one is supposed to die. No one is supposed to be separated from God. Jesus comes to tend to all of those hurts. They are all a result of sin. They are all things we suffer from as well.

We need the good news of forgiveness. We need healing from all of the ailments of this life. We need comfort when we are down. We need caring people to support us when life gets difficult. Jesus isn't content to sit and preach and heal in just one place. He has to go where the people are. He has to seek out those in need, like a shepherd searching for his lost sheep. He knows they are suffering and goes to them to help them. He goes to them to set them free from the power of sin, to forgive them, to heal them, to protect them against the terrors of this world in the way only God can.

The same love is what brought Jesus to earth in the first place. He comes to where the people are hurting and where they need his help. So he comes here, to you, to poor creatures weighed down by sin and he comes to proclaim the good news, that your sins are forgiven. He offers his body and blood to sustain you with his grace and to comfort and strengthen you with his presence. He comes here to care for your needs and assure you he is with you. He reminds you he will seek you out wherever you are and never abandon you.

The love he shows to us as he comes to earth to find you and save you also shows us something else. While we still need to proclaim the good news to those who are weighed down by their sins, that proclamation goes hand in hand with caring for them in other ways. You don't need to be an eloquent speaker to offer comfort to someone grieving. You don't need to have extensive theological training to help someone who is having a difficult time in life. You don't need to be a pastor to care for someone who is suffering from some affliction, even if it is just to be there while they go through it. These are all gifts God has given you and are all ways to show his love. Proclaiming the good news and caring for God's people go hand in hand. They always have. God has equipped you to share his love in word and deed, to be his caring connection to those in pain. Go, as God has gifted you and given you the opportunity. Speak forgiveness to those who are suffering from the weight of their guilt. Comfort those who are in pain in body or mind. Support those in need of a little help and encouragement, and know that by doing so, you share the love of God with them too.