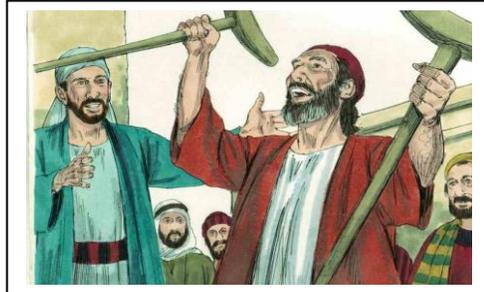


Coop's Scoops #159 Sunday February 7, 2021

Fifth after Epiphany

Sentence: He took our infirmities, and bore our diseases. (Matthew 8: 17)



Readings: Isaiah 40: 21-31 Psalm 147: 1-11, 20c 1 Corinthians 9: 16-23

The Collect: Merciful Lord, grant to your faithful people pardon and peace, that we may be cleansed from all our sins and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Mark 1: 29-39

²⁹ As soon as they^[a] left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹ He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³² That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³ And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴ 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.

³⁵ In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and his companions

hunted for him. ³⁷ When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” ³⁸ 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.” ³⁹ And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Sermon:

Our readings this morning together portray a herald shouting out the “order of things” needed by the people of planet earth and how it is that they can be realized. Isaiah spells out the problem: Do you not hear? Do you not see? It is God Himself who is the source of all good, of all creation, and it is God Himself who wishes to be revealed so that human beings can know Him. Not because He’s seeking “fans”, but because He is filled with so much love. Love needs to flow out and love needs to flow in, and God has a plan to make that happen. It begins when we people can look to the stars in the darkest night and comprehend that they have been created and named and tossed throughout all space to teach us that there IS a God, and that He names that which He loves. That is the Message for all ages: God is, God creates and sustains everything and God loves. God is love.

Mark the evangelist and disciple moves us very quickly into how Jesus is going to proclaim and herald that same message to the people of His time. In chapter one, Jesus comes to John the Baptist, is Baptist, is proclaimed the Lamb of God, calls some disciples, goes to the Temple and preaches as ONE With AUTHORITY. As One directly connected to God. A new prophetic voice! His fame spreads throughout all the land.

Mark breathlessly moves us from the synagogue to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon’s mother-in-law is ill with a fever. Jesus raises her up from her bed, and the fever leaves her, and she is strong and well.

After supper, the whole city of Capernaum seems to have arrived around the door to that little home, and Jesus goes forth into the crowd to heal and deliver all who need His touch. When the sun sets and the work is done, Jesus goes off to pray alone. Soon His disciples come to find Him and tell Him that all the people were seeking Him. Jesus simply states that it's time to move on. It's time to go into all the other towns. Why? To heal all the sick? To cast out demons? Jesus tells us "why" He needs to go, and it is because "I must go and **preach** the message, for that is why I came". Jesus came primarily to PREACH. That's hard to grasp some times. Jesus, like Isaiah, wanted people to come to fully understand that God IS, and God SUSTAINS, and God loves them. Jesus wanted people to hear, and see, and know GOD, and come to know that they could love Him too. Later on in Corinthians, Paul speaks of the both the right and the obligation of every disciple of Jesus right down to you and me at this time. Our job is to speak the Gospel, so that all people can know the grace and love of God. We'll do it in different ways, but that is our task. We are "ambassadors"ⁱ for Christ; talking and walking and living as He would do were He still upon the earth. Jesus said "I must preach the message. That is why I came" and that, my friends is why we are to "go".

As for Jesus, so for us....He found hurting, wounded people in need of healing and so will we. Let's talk about Christian healing now. It can be a thorny subject, because there is such a huge amount of both wisdom and folly when people talk about God's healing. The **wisdom** comes from the Scriptures and from the experiences of faithful people of God. The **folly** comes from a misunderstanding of the difference between faith and magic. Magic insists that there is a "formula" we can follow that puts God in a box so that He will have to heal us, or someone for whom we pray. Faith insists

that God is in control, and that our part is to receive whatever it is He gives us in answer to our prayers.

When I was fresh and new to the faith, I attended a Healing Conference in which I was taught that if we fasted for seven days, repented for seven days and had the Church gather to pray for us for seven days, then our healing was GUARANTEED. God would have to heal us. Stuff and nonsense, I have learned. And not at all Scriptural. A magic formula not faith. Formulas are all about **faith** healing: Faith is about **Divine** healing.

Now Jesus clearly, repeatedly, kindly, and openly healed many people in His time of ministry on earth. Blind Bartimaeus, the man with a withered hand, the ten lepers, the paralytic let down through the roof, Peter's mother-in-law, the little girl called Tabitha, the demoniac chained in the graveyard...and many many others we know only as "the crowds". Yet, Jesus was quiet and didn't want people to be overly impressed about all this wonder. He usually, with very few exceptions, told His disciples and His healed people to keep silent and do no more than what the temple priests required. There was something about healing which caused people to praise God. But there was also something about healing which caused people to take their eyes away from God, and rejoice only in the healing rather than giving glory to the Healer. Something which led them to start to believe that the crucial thing was their **faith**. Now faith is indeed critical. But faith in what? Faith in faith? **Faith in "faith"** is when you believe if you can just work up "enough" faith, if you can just believe despite all evidence, if you "claim" your healing as accomplished even while you are still sick...then if you do that, God will have to honour your faith by healing you. And when He doesn't, you are racked by guilt for not having enough faith. Others may be only too happy to agree with you. They may, like Job's friends, even add

that the real problem is sin in you that you haven't confessed, so God won't hear your prayers. It can hurt very, very deeply. **Faith in "Divine healing"**, healing that begins and ends with God, does not pile such burdens upon anyone. We do not manufacture or earn our own healing, we receive it, if and when it comes, as a gift from God who is not hindered or confined in His healing power by anything at all to do with us. As ambassadors of Jesus, people speaking His message, we can simply help people to know it is good to ask for what they need, that God welcomes and hears their heart cries, and that it is sufficient to receive whatever happens without either guilt or pride. We are not the healers; we are the "preachers". The message bearers. The Ambassadors.

Jesus told His disciples at the end of His time upon this earth to "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all people". At the very beginning of His ministry, as we read in Mark chapter One, Jesus said that was why **He** had to go into all the towns. He trusts **us** to go and do likewise. And He is with us on every road and byway, every little nook and cranny as we obey His commandment. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Prayers:

We lift into your Presence, O Lord, those we know who suffer from illness, distress, and pain.

May they be so filled with your Spirit that they are comforted by your care, compassion and love. It is our deep desire that they be healed in body, mind and spirit so that they may live life in Your abundant joy. May they, and we, be still and know that You are God and receive from You the blessings which You alone can provide. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God, you have given us grace to bring our prayers to you, and you promise that when two or three agree together in your name you will grant their requests. Fulfil now, Lord, our desires and prayers, as may be best for us. Grant us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. **Amen. (prayer of Saint Chrysostom)**

Blessing: May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds fixed on the love of God and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, and the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you always!
