

Baptism of Liana Catherine Johnson

Jesu Juva

“Precious”

Text: Mark 1:29-39; Isaiah 40:21-31 (1 Corinthians 9:16-27)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus was at church on the Sabbath Day. No surprise there. It's what comes next that is surprising: He goes to Simon's house. Lowly, little, Simon's house. A humble fisherman's house. And it probably smelled like it, too. And with Andrew, James, and John. There probably weren't enough seats for all of them. But there He is. The One who proclaims His coming as the coming of the kingdom of God. The One who calls men from their work to be about His work. The One who is mightier than unclean spirits and strikes fear into them. Surely He has important work to do. Things for the Messiah to do! Places to go, people to see. Indeed He does. And that place is Simon's house, and that person Simon's mother-in-law. There is nothing more important to Him at that time, no place He'd rather be, than there, in this humble home, with this sick old woman in her need.

Is that not remarkable? And until we learn to know God that way, we will not know Him. For He is not just God who has come to save the world - Jesus is God who has come to save you.

This is what Isaiah was talking about. Yes, compared to the Creator we are like *grasshoppers*. Yes, He is the Lord of the seasons. He raises up nations and *brings princes to nothing*. The sun and stars and planets He keeps in their places, and their number - beyond our knowing - He knows. And compared to that, maybe you have thought: *who am I?* Or as Isaiah put it, it may seem that *My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God*. For with all that going on, why should God even *know* about me, let alone *care* about me? And if our starting point is the vastness of creation and the infinite greatness and power and knowledge of God, then that seems like an appropriate question with a self-evident answer. He has more important work to do than *anything* for me.

And yet, Isaiah says, that is not the case. That's what satan would like us to believe. He doesn't mind you believing in a God like that, who doesn't really care for you and to whom you are nothing more than a bug. But Jesus is that infinite, powerful God become flesh, for you. That infinite, powerful God who, Isaiah says, *gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength*. That's what Jesus did for Simon's mother-in-law. And so in Him, we learn who God is and how God is.

And once that word got out, when the sabbath rest was over at sundown, the people ***brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons***. And He did for them as He had done for Simon's mother-in-law. Men, women, young, old. Or to finish Isaiah's thought: ***Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted***. Even those in the prime and strength of life are not unaffected by the struggles and burdens and troubles of this world and life. You know that. But here's the good news: ***they who wait for the Lord*** - those who hope in the Lord - ***shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint***.

Or in other words, there is a restoration, a new life, for those who hope in the Lord. Jesus gives a glimpse of that with His healing. But the healing itself was not the goal, the end-all. If it was, then those who came looking for Him the next day should rightly have been mad that He didn't stay and heal them. And we could be rightly mad when He doesn't heal us or our loved ones. But the healing was not the point. In fact, all those healed that day would succumb again - sooner or later - to illness and death. The healing was a sign, a pointer, to the *greater* restoration Jesus had come to provide, in *the mounting up* of the resurrection. When all weakness, all illness, all faintness and weariness, and then even death itself will finally be ended. In Jesus, the God of all life has come to provide that life. *For you*.

And that's why just like the folks of Capernaum that day, Anthony and Hillary brought little Liana to Jesus today. Because He has what she needs. And so her parents brought her where they heard Jesus was; even more, where He has *promised* to be. Here, for her. Just for her. In these waters, where He has put His Word, His Name, and His Spirit. And so He is there. To wash away her sin. To make her His. For truly, today, like Simon's mother-in-law, Liana cannot do anything for Jesus. Liana did not make Jesus hers - Jesus made her His.

And that's why you also have come to this place. You who are weary and faint from another week in the world, another week under the assaults of the evil one, another week of weakness and failure. You have come because you heard Jesus is here - for you! - and so have come to reclaim those promises He made to you in your baptism. To receive the strength and raising up of Isaiah. And so you confessed your sin and weakness and failure to make Christ and His forgiveness yours. And then you heard again the Word of Christ's forgiveness, by which you are His. And then shortly now you will come to His Table, where the almighty, powerful, infinite God will serve you with His Body and Blood. For that's who God is and how God is. The Lord and Giver of life. Here, as He promised, for you.

Here, as He promised, because *Jesus'* sabbath is now over. His sabbath rest in the tomb after His work on the cross was finished. And now He is risen and working. For Liana,

for you, for each and every person. For as Isaiah would put it a little bit later, *by His wounds we are healed* (Isaiah 53:5). By His wounds. By the blood poured out on the cross, and now poured out upon you in baptism and absolution, and poured into you in His Supper. There is your healing from sin and death. There is your strength against temptation and your power when faint - when the burdens and struggles and trials of this life weigh you down. Male, female, young, old. You come where you have heard Jesus is. You come where He has promised to be for you.

And when you have thus been raised and lifted up from your sin and death by your Saviour . . . Simon's mother-in-law got up *and began to serve them*. She put a kettle on. Made some bread. Served the Sabbath brunch. Big deal? Yes! Big deal. Not because of what she did, but because of who she was. This was her epiphany - that she - she! - was precious. And she knew to whom she was precious. Her. Little old her. The kingdom of God had come to her. In Jesus.

It's the same with St. Paul. The kingdom of God had come to Him in Jesus. Turned him, changed him, raised him. That was his epiphany - that he was precious, but not the way he thought he was before. He, the persecutor, was precious to the one whom he had been persecuting! Him. Awful, sinful, misguided him. But Jesus came just for him. And after he got up, Paul writes to the Corinthians (as we heard): I have to preach this. I have to live this. To all people. Whoever they are, however they are. Jews, Greeks, weak, strong. They too need this epiphany - that they are precious. To Jesus. That He cares for them. That's the who and how of God.

And now you too, raised and lifted up from your sin and death by your Saviour. You are precious. And you know to whom you are precious. Like Simon's mother-in-law and St. Paul and now Liana, you are not the same. You have been made new, for the kingdom of God has come to you. And so new you now serves, too. And here's the thing - and this is really important and really the point when we talk about serving - the question is not how, but *who*?

So don't get hung up on the how, or on the what. You see, I think that's the problem most of the time. When we think of helping or serving we think of the what and the how and then get caught up in the time, the effort, the energy, the cost and think we cannot do it. And then we do not do it. But as we've been hearing today, it's not the *what* - it's the *who*. The what may be simply putting on a kettle. The what may be big and impressive like St. Paul. The what may be bringing a child to be baptized. The what may be going to a desolate place and praying. The what may be a myriad of things, small or great. But the what will work itself out when the *who* is the focus. The one who is precious, as you are precious. Each and every life precious, and worth the life of the Son of God. Who is here, for you. Who is here for them. And you there . . . for *who*?

That's the way of our good and gracious God. And what the season of Epiphany is all about - the *who* of Christmas. That's what we see that day in Capernaum. That's what we saw here this morning. Precious Jesus. Precious you. And there's no place He'd rather be. And there's nothing more important for Him than you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

[A few of the words and thoughts for this sermon from *Selected Sermons of Norman Nagel*, CPH (c) 2004, p 56-58.]