

7 February 2021
Epiphany 5

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Jesus: Preacher of Life”

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.

Yes, Simon Peter was married. I’m not sure what his wife thought when he told her that he was quitting his job to follow Jesus of Nazareth and become a fisher of men! Was there any money to be made in that? I guess Jesus coming to their home and healing her mother helped smooth things out a bit. But Peter wasn’t home much after that . . . In fact, they left the very next day.

Before that, if Peter’s house was where they were staying, it was quite the day. *The whole city*, Mark tells us, *was gathered together at the door* of their house that evening. As soon as the Sabbath was past at sundown, they came out in droves. No social distancing in Capernaum that day! It was shoulder-to-shoulder at Peter’s house with the sick and demon oppressed - all kinds of people, all kinds of diseases, all wanting to see Jesus, all wanting to be healed. And Jesus healed them. One-by-one, well into the evening, I’m sure.

Then, after a busy night and not much sleep, Jesus rises *very early in the morning*, Mark tells us, *while it was still dark*, to go pray. It must have been very important to Him. To talk to His Father. A good lesson for us. But when Peter and the others found Him, Jesus says: *time to go*. No long good-byes. No more healings in Capernaum. It’s time to go to the next towns. That’s why Jesus came out. And off they go.

Which, at first, seems terribly unfair to the folks in Capernaum - those who didn’t get in to see Jesus for healing that night, but probably showed up early that next morning. But Jesus was already gone. So why some and not others? Why them and not us?

Well, Jesus Himself provides us with the answer. For when Peter and the others find Him, He says to them: *Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out*. Notice what Jesus *didn’t* say . . . that I may *heal* there, that I may *cast out demons* there. He says only, that I may *preach* there. And with that we get an insight into Jesus and why He did what He did. **He was preaching**. He preached with His words, yes, but not only that. His healing was really preaching. His cleansing lepers was really preaching. His casting out demons was really preaching. That’s why He didn’t let the demons speak - they weren’t authorized to preach. He was. So when Jesus says, *Let*

us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, it's not that He's not going to heal folks there also - He will. He does. To Jesus, healing and cleansing and casting out demons is preaching. Preaching who He is and what He has come to do.

The miracles, though, get all the press, all the attention. Those are the stories we like, and that's what we want still today. Healing from our sicknesses. Solutions to our problems. Providing what we need. We pray for those things all the time, right? And it's not wrong to pray for those things. We should. And Jesus wants us to. Those are good prayers. He wants us, like those people in Capernaum that day, to come to Him with our sicknesses and demons.

But have you ever prayed for preaching? That when you came to church today the Law would really cut you open and expose your sin? And that you would leave with forgiveness so bountiful and free that you couldn't wait to go out and forgive others? Maybe you have prayed that. If so, you're a better Christian than me. But that's really what Jesus is all about. He didn't come to be a healer. He didn't come to just cast out demons. He didn't come to just provide us temporary relief from the trials of life. He came to overcome much worse than these. He came to overcome sin for us. And by overcoming sin, also overthrowing death and the grave. So we could have a life that is eternal. As it was meant to be.

Because all those people He healed were going to get sick again. Some day, some way. And they would die. And what then? Without preaching, all we have are memories. Without preaching, all we have are regrets. Without preaching, all we can do is try to celebrate a life now ended, while sorrowing and grieving a loss we can't undo. But with preaching we have hope. That our loss can be undone. Of life not ended. Of forgiveness for our regrets. And of memories still to come. Because preaching, true preaching, Christian preaching, Jesus preaching, gives us all that. That's why Jesus preaches. That all may know that God is here *to save*. To save we who cannot save ourselves.

We keep trying, though! To save ourselves. We're going to save ourselves with masks, with social distancing, with washing our hands, with a vaccine. We're going to save ourselves by saving our planet, by going to all electric cars, by science and medical technology making us live longer than ever. We're going to save ourselves by colonizing Mars, so if we can't save our planet we have someplace to go. Again, there's nothing wrong with those things. It's okay to do those things, even good. We should take care of each other, care for the creation God gave us, and explore it. But those things aren't going to save us. They can't. For all those things assume our problem is man made, and so the solution will be man made. But that's not true. **Our problem is death.** Death that doesn't just happen, but that is the punishment of sinners for their sin. And there's only ONE who can get us out of that.

And Jesus came to do just that.

Consider what we heard from the prophet Isaiah today. First, he says, God is so great, so vast over all creation, that we are like *grasshoppers* to Him. Actually, I think that is a bit generous. Cockroaches might be better, because of our sin and filth. Or gnats, or fleas - little and irritating. Even the people we think are great in this world, like *princes* and *rulers* (or maybe today we would say sports stars or celebrities) die and get blown away *like stubble*, like tumbleweeds. God created the stars and the heavens and calls them by name and brings them out and keeps them all there. And so maybe, Isaiah says, it seems as if we are so little, so insignificant, that our *way is hidden from the Lord*, and our *right disregarded*. That we really don't matter.

But then, Isaiah says . . . Wait! *Have you not known? Have you not heard?* (Heard! Preaching!) You *do* matter! Your way is not hidden and God does regard you. Even you. Little you. Sinful you. For your God - this great and awesome and powerful God - comes to give *power to the faint* and *strength* to the weary. And not just for this life, for here and now, with just healing and strength for a little while. But even when you fall *exhausted* into death, there is hope for *those who wait for the Lord*. You shall be renewed. You shall rise up. To a life no longer burdened and effected by sin. A life that will never end.

And your great and awesome and powerful God did that by becoming small and weak like you - born a baby and laid in a manger. And then He did that by becoming condemned with your sin and dying like you - crucified and laid in a tomb. And then He did that by rising up from death to a life that can no longer be burdened and effected by sin, overcoming all that. **For you**. He didn't need it. He already had it. But you didn't. So this God - the everlasting, the Creator - did that for you. *How 'bout that?* Isaiah preaches.

And at Peter's house that day, and throughout all Galilee, Jesus preached that. That God was here to save us. Jesus preached that. His miracles preached that. And His resurrection preached that.

Then the apostles preached that. And most were martyred for that preaching. But death could not take the life they had been given by Christ. So their martyrdom preached, too - of this confidence and joy we have even when faced with death. That confidence and joy, as we heard, caused Paul to become all things to all people **because Jesus became ONE thing for all people: our Saviour**. So Paul compares this life to an athletic contest. Look at all people do just to win a prize that'll just wind up in a box somewhere, and fame that fades away. The discipline, the sacrifices, the hardships they endure! Yet the prize waiting for us, won for us by Christ, is eternal. So don't give that up, he says, for something here and now that is just going to get blown away by the wind, dried up by the sun, or forgotten by all. That doesn't really make sense, does it? And yet . . . when look at your life . . . what are you fighting for? Vying for?

Well, the life, the renewal, the resurrection you need is here for you. For the Jesus who went through all the towns of Galilee, has come to this town as well, preaching. Preaching with His Word, preaching with the water of Baptism, and now preaching with His Body and Blood, that Your God and His forgiveness and life are here for you. This is why He came. You are why He came. That no fever, no virus, no demon, no illness, not even death would have the final word. He will. And that Word will be: *arise!* And you will. All weakness and illness gone. Your sin gone. Your death gone. And only life left standing.

Did the folks in Capernaum that day understand that when they came back the next morning and Jesus wasn't there? I'm sure not. But they would. When the tomb was empty and the apostles preached the resurrection. Demons are bad but hell is worse. Sickness is bad but death is worse. Problems are bad but condemnation is worse. And all that worse is what Jesus has overcome. For them, and for you, and for all people.

And now the Church today preaches that. Not preaching how to have a better life or how to be a good person, *but preaching Jesus*. For if you have Jesus and His life, the rest will come.

So come and receive His Body and Blood. The demons don't want anything to do with this. It is the strength you need, the forgiveness of your sin, and as the ancients called it, the medicine of immortality. Then go into your towns and villages, your homes and communities - wherever you are sent - and live in this confidence and joy. Let your friends and family and neighbors see and hear the hope we have. And that they can have, too.

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.