

## Mark 1: Service, Demons, and Eternal Healing

Our Gospel lesson today is three paragraphs long and I think each paragraph gives us something to think on. So let's get right into it.

The first paragraph is the account of Jesus leaving the synagogue in Capernaum and going literally less than a hundred yards to Peter's house. Where he heals Peter's mother in law, which tells us by the way, that Peter was married. I point out verse 31, "And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them."

Look at Peter's Mother in law, look at her response to the mercy of God: She is healed so she serves. Ever wonder what the meaning of life is? We see it here. It's to live. But to live staring at a wall all day? No. Staring at a screen all day? No. To hoard up as much pleasure as you can for yourself no matter what you leave in your wake? No. The meaning of life is to live, how? By serving your neighbor.

God made us not to be alone, but to explore his creation together, and to celebrate in our respective gifts and efforts and life together. Of course we fall into sin ruined this and now we die so a great way to serve your neighbor is to tell them about the One who gives them eternal life! But when we die and he raises us up in his kingdom what are we going to do all day? Stare at walls? No, we are going to get out there and live.

And since we have received mercy from Jesus, just as Peter's mother in law did, lets start now! Let's receive the merciful hand of the Lord and then live lives of service to our neighbor and to the Kingdom. So in the first paragraph of our reading we see a proper response to the mercy of God and a way to fulfillment and peace in life: service.

Paragraph two: The news of the healing spreads which, naturally, brings more people in need of the mercy of the King. Jesus doesn't sigh and moan about all the free-loaders, no, he bits all to come to him for free mercy – oh, that the world was full of free-loaders! So the people come for mercy, and he gets to the business of dispensing mercy. He heals others, and he casts out demons.

Demons! I think that's something we smart, enlightened, Americans can meditate on for a bit. Demons? Really? Is this a fairy tale? Is this just people who were mentally ill and they in the ancient world were too dumb to know it? I'm not so sure. Even if the people didn't know, God certainly would. And so why would he lie to us in his word and say they were demons, when really it was just borderline personality disorder or something? I don't think God would pull wool over our eyes like that. Perhaps a less myopic viewpoint would be for us to admit that we have not seen or experienced the fullness of reality or the fullness of the Spiritual warfare that assaults us.

In the book, “I am not afraid,” by an LCMS Pastor, Robert Bennett, he spends sometime in the Churches of Madagascar hearing accounts and seeing those coming out of ancestor worship. He left convinced that their visions of visitors and ancestors were real. Well, real in the sense that they were seeing something, but he and the victims would come to believe and know, it wasn't their grandparent they were seeing, but something trying to trick them. Trying to trick them into idolatry and ancestor worship, as long as it keeps them apart from God, that's fine with the evil one.

A natural question then of course is: Why don't we see this stuff here? Well, I think it's because the evil one has a different trick to play on us “smart folk” who don't believe in nonsense like spiritual beings. As the common saying goes, “the best lie the devil ever told was convincing the world he didn't exist.” He knows you and me. He knows we are far more susceptible to the lie that there is no devil, no demons, and no God. We all got here by chance, we live and die, and that's it. No meaning of life at all. If he can convince us of that he is just fine, very selfless of him in a way. Just as long as we are suffering apart from God with him.

The reality is, as the scriptures and testimony make clear, the demonic is real. Look at our news for crying out loud – celebrating death and depravity! It makes a lot more sense, once you understand a prowling lion is out there. That doesn't mean psychology isn't real, no, both can be true. But let's wake up to the fact that there

is a prowling lion out there and prepare ourselves accordingly. Let's learn to use that sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and let's fight the good fight.

And we can have courage in that fight because we know we don't fight alone.

Let's look at the third paragraph. This is the account of Jesus leaving Capernaum.

Leaving some disappointed people behind, I might add. Imagine you live in the neighboring town and you have had back pain for years and years, you can hardly walk. Then your friend, who had dropsy, or whatever, bangs down your door.

"Come to Capernaum, there is a man healing – look, my dropsy is gone!" You don't believe him, but you can't deny his dropsy is gone, so you get up in pain and start hobbling toward Capernaum. Miles and hours later you get there. The town is buzzing, people are rejoicing, crying from happiness, but by the time you get through the crowd Jesus is gone. He left.

Verse, 36 and 37, "And Simon (Peter) and those who were with him searched for Jesus, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." Can you see why? Because more people could use his healing, but not all got it. I wonder what you would feel like trudging home in pain after Jesus decided not to come back, but moved on to the other towns. Maybe you would get a chance to see him there, but what if you didn't? What if the man with the bad back never got to see him?

Pretty sad, I think. But again, I think we all know exactly how this feels, because we never got to see Jesus in his ministry either. We, like the man with the bad back, don't seem to get the instant, miraculous healing either.

But, again, did everyone get healed in 1<sup>st</sup> century galilee? Why not? Why does Jesus move on? Is it because he didn't care? No, we know better than that, don't we. He moved on because he had something better in plan for those people. Yes even the people he healed. He took dropsy away, praise God, but then the ulcer comes along. Then something else, then death. That's what he had his eyes set on. Defeating death, that thing that robs us of the life he gave us, he had his eyes set on defeating the demons who seek to pry us from the truth and separate us from God.

So the healing ministry of Jesus embodies and testifies to his mercy and compassion. But the fullness of his mercy and compassion, and the fulness of his victory is not shown in his ministry with a healing here and there. It is shown more fully on the cross where: by his stripes we are healed. Where he dies for our sin and evil desires. His healing and victory is shown more fully in his resurrection where he defies death and the devil and is living proof that they don't win.

And the gravity of the cross and empty tomb is why we are still celebrating it and rejoicing in it today. Because it is the down payment on the promises that he has given us that we will share in his victory. And the fulness of that will be shown on

the Last Day when the archangel grabs the devil by the throat and casts him into hell and his demons run after with their tails tucked. On that day when the dead are raised there will be no dropsy and that man's back won't hurt anymore. On that day the fulness of God's plan and the scope of his victory will be made known and it will be unimaginably glorious.

And what will we do on that day? We will rejoice and celebrate. "And will someone pass the bread?" I think someone will, what an act of service to keep the joy going. And maybe I'll pass the wine down, "happy to." And maybe we will go grow a bit more. And we can serve along with Peter's mother in law, and our backs won't hurt doing it. And no shadows of fear, doubt, or depression will darken our doors or minds, because every enemy has been conquered by the Risen King. Yes, let's not forget the King, never forget the King when you think of heaven and the new creation. He is not the eternal killjoy he is the host of the party and his victory and life and healing won't be moving on to the next town, leaving some unfulfilled, unhealed, no, it will be ever present even as he is and we will be.

First paragraph: Service. Second: Battle. Third: Eternal healing in a Risen King.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.