

He Came to Preach  
Mark 1:29-39

One evening, Susan and two of her girlfriends went to a nightclub, only to find the place packed with young people. At 40, they felt rather old and out of place, but before they could make a dignified exit, a tall, handsome man approached them. *“Perhaps we were being a little hasty in leaving,”* Susan said to her friends. Then with a big smile, the man extended his hand and said, *“Hi. Remember me? You were my third grade teacher!”*

Ouch! That is one of the harsh realities of life – that we’re all getting older. In fact, each day we’re one step closer to the grave, for that is the curse of sin. To be sure, that is why there is sickness and disease, aging and atrophy, hardship and heartache in this fallen world. Thankfully for us, though, our Lord Jesus Christ came to confront all of that and to conquer it for you and me. That’s why He came to preach and to heal, to live and to die for us. Such is the theme of St. Mark’s Gospel, and we see it wonderfully exemplified in our text for today.

St. Mark tells us that Jesus and the disciples had just left the synagogue and gone back to their home-base, Peter’s house, where they discovered that Peter’s mother-in-law was ill with a fever. Luke, the physician describes it as a ‘great fever,’ in other words, a high, burning fever. Interestingly enough, the Jewish Talmud had instructions for how to deal with a burning fever. A knife made out of iron was to be tied with a braid of the person’s hair to a thorn bush. Then on successive days, the words of Exodus 3, the account of Moses and burning bush, were to be repeated. Finally a magical formula was pronounced, and that was supposed to affect a cure.

In sharp contrast to that, Jesus ignored all the superstitions of popular magic, and with a simple gesture, He lifted her up and restored her. He spoke His almighty Word of power and authority, and completely healed her. Here we see a beautiful glimpse of the Gospel itself – that Jesus came to heal not just our bodies, but especially our souls. You see, Scripture reminds us not only that illness and disease are one of the deadly consequences of the Fall, but that sin itself is like a hereditary sickness that clings to our soul and condemns us to eternal death. Jesus Himself alluded to that, when He said: “IT IS NOT THE HEALTHY WHO NEED A DOCTOR, BUT THE SICK,” referring to our desperate need for the salvation of our sin-sick souls.

My friends, we see the symptoms of that terminal disease in the actual sins we commit daily in thought, word and deed. The way we turn up our noses at those who are different from us. The way we can't wait to share a juicy tidbit of scandalous news about someone behind their back. The way we lust after the impure passions of the flesh and party to excess. But those are just the indicators of a much deeper and more deadly infection – our inborn, original sin, which leads to a prognosis of God's everlasting anger and punishment in hell.

However, just as you don't slap a bandage on a wound without first cleansing it, lest the infection spread, and you don't merely treat the fever that accompanies a virus, without combating the virus itself, so Jesus came not only to cleanse the effects of our guilt, but to completely stamp out the virus of our sin altogether and remove that infection for good. In the words of Psalm 103: “HE FORGIVES ALL YOUR SINS, AND HEALS ALL YOUR DISEASES, AND REDEEMS YOUR LIFE FROM THE PIT.” That's what the healing of Peter's mother-in-law was about. It wasn't just a sign of His compassion upon one of His hurting children. But it was a window into the

cross, where He demonstrated His ultimate compassion for us, when He hung there in our place, and suffered for our sins and infirmities, and laid down His life to save us. In short, the healing miracles are meant to show us the healing power of the Gospel, which brings relief to the sin-sick soul.

As a matter of fact, in St. Luke's description of this miracle, he tells us that Jesus rebuked her fever and it left her, which is precisely what Jesus has done to our sin and guilt. He has rebuked it and it has left us. To underscore that thought, he uses the main word in the New Testament for forgiveness, a verb that means: 'to send away, to release or let loose.' It's the promise that by His sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus has released us from the bondage of our iniquity and sent our sins so far away from us, that they can't come back to haunt us. Maybe that's why, in classical Greek this same word means 'acquittal' – to remind us that by the healing power of the Gospel, all charges of the Law against us have been dropped and we've been completely exonerated, declared 'not guilty!'

Certainly that would explain why Jesus dealt so tenderly with Peter's mother-in-law. He gently took her by that hand, lifted her up and made her well again. And He ministers to you and me with that same tender loving care, that same personal touch. He touches us with the water and Word in Baptism, to cleanse us of all unrighteousness. He touches us with the Word of reassurance in Absolution, to comfort us with forgiveness and peace. He touches us with His very own body and blood given with bread and wine to nourish our souls with pardon and redemption. He touches us personally in the Word and Sacraments, to lift us up from the illness of our sin and make us whole again.

No wonder, that when the crowds heard about it, they sought Jesus out for healing. Literally, they pursued Him

closely and tracked Him down. And that's what He encourages us to do each and every day – to seek Him out in His Word and Sacraments, so that we can constantly be healed by His forgiving touch. And how did Jesus respond to the crowds? He didn't complain about their neediness. He didn't send them away in disgust. Instead, He healed their sick and cast out their demons. And that's a beautiful reminder for us. Whenever we come to Him in humble repentance and faith, He will never ignore us or turn us away, but will always cast out our sin.

In fact, the verb 'cast out' is used of throwing something overboard or driving a bad actor off the stage, which is exactly what Jesus came to do to our enemies: sin and Satan, death and hell. He came to drive out our sins, by throwing them overboard once and for all. He came to drive Satan off the stage, so that he cannot hurt or harm us anymore. Phillip Yancey in his book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, describes it this way: *"The miracles Jesus did perform, breaking as they did the chains of sickness and death, give me a glimpse of what the world was meant to be and instill hope that one day God will right its wrongs. To put it mildly, God is no more satisfied with this world than we are; Jesus' miracles offer a hint of what God intends to do about it."*

Simply put, He intends to conquer sin, death and hell forever, and to bring us to our Heavenly Home where finally everything will be put right. That's where we will be totally healed of the curse of sin. And Jesus did that, not just by His healing miracles, but especially by preaching the Gospel. As Jesus told His disciples: "LET US GO ON TO THE NEXT TOWNS, THAT I MAY PREACH THERE ALSO, FOR THAT IS WHY I CAME OUT!" The ultimate miracle is the preaching of the Gospel, the Good News that Jesus has vanquished our enemies once and for all and put them in their place for good.

That is the Gospel that Jesus came, not only to preach and proclaim, but to accomplish for us by His sacrificial death on the cross and His victorious resurrection from the grave.

There is an ancient Greek legend about Pheidippides, an Athenian herald, who was sent to Sparta in 490 BC, to request help when the Persians landed at Marathon, Greece. He ran 150 miles in two days. He then ran the 26 miles from the battlefield to announce the Greek victory over Persia in the Battle of Marathon. He was so exhausted that he uttered one final word, Nenikekamen, 'We have Won.' And then he died on the spot.

Dear friends, without a doubt Pheidippides gave his all. He gave his life to bring the message to the people. In an even greater way, Jesus gave His life to bring us the ultimate message – the Good News of forgiveness and eternal life in His healing name. He ran the ultimate marathon from heaven to earth, to proclaim our victory, that He has won salvation for us. That's why He came to preach. The Greek text actually says that He came to 'herald' it. Of course, a Herald is someone commissioned by the king to go into the village square and shout out the glad tidings. And he is given the king's staff to show that he is authorized to bring the message.

In the same way, God the Great King, has commissioned you and me to be His heralds, to bring the message of salvation to all the world. And the staff which authorizes us to do that is the Word of God, which we are to share with others. In that regard, I pray that we would be like Peter's mother-in-law. As soon as she was healed, she immediately began to serve them. Since Jesus has healed our sin-sick soul, may God the Holy Spirit empower us to serve Him gladly, by heralding the Gospel, and actively witnessing it in our daily lives. For Jesus' sake, Amen.