

5th SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
February 4, 2018

Text: Mark 1:29-39

Theme: A Resurrected Life

It is not easy coming up with messages for our signboard. I look for thoughtful and creative statements that are faith-based and inspiring. Sometimes I try to be humorous. I struggled for three weeks over this one message and debated with myself on whether it should go up (or not). I tested it out on several people before making a final decision. In the end, it was on our signboard the following week. It read:

Do the hokey pokey and turn your life around.

The following day someone who lives in McLean left me a voicemail. She saw our sign and with a great deal of excitement in her voice she shared that this was the day she would start to turn her life around. It was her birthday and the message inspired her to make some needed changes.

Some of you know I struggle to come up with something pithy every week so you send me suggestions. One of our members sent me this message (for Super Bowl) but I chose not to put it up because I knew it would upset some people. It would have read:

Bible Quiz

How many verses in the Bible are about Eagles and Patriots?

Eagles – 33 / Patriots – 0

Just a little light humor! And truth-be-told, I had every intention of letting it go but after reading our lessons this morning the temptation was too great. Did you hear it when it was read? It was at the very end of the Old Testament reading from Isaiah.

Hear it is again (in case you missed it):

But those who wait for 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.

In 1994 the Revised Common Lectionary was published, and we have been in this three-year cycle (to read these lessons) ever since. So I ask you this morning:

What is the chance of this text being read (on this Sunday) when it was made public twenty-four years ago? I do not believe in coincidences so I stand in awe of God. I am no prophet but we will know the truth of these words at the end of the fourth quarter tonight.

On a more serious note, our Old Testament lessons for today create a majestic image of God who sits high above the skies. He has no equal in heaven or on earth. Great is our God and mighty in power. He is greater than any ruler. He has incredible strength. He counts the stars and calls them all by their names. His understanding is unsearchable.

What a staggering image of God as he looms high above and around us. It would be easy for us to surmise that such a God is not very accessible especially when Isaiah calls us mere grasshoppers. But what is truly remarkable about our God is that he also stands at our side. Earlier in the same chapter, God is described as the shepherd who feeds his flock, who gathers the lambs in his arms, and who carries them close to his heart. God sees us. God genuinely cares for us. God provides for us and when we are faint, weary and exhausted, we know we can draw on the strength of God to be renewed.

We also meet that accessible and tangible God in the form of Jesus Christ. We have been reading from Mark 1 for the past four weeks but it is in our lesson for today that we witness the fullness of his power and strength. But there is no time to dawdle (we need to keep our running shoes on) because the author of Mark moves us quickly from one event to the next. The God described in Isaiah who sat in the heavens is now visibly on earth ... and he is very busy!

The author of Mark does not even have time to give us any details of Jesus' birth. He starts with the baptism of Jesus that inaugurated his ministry. Then Jesus was immediately driven into the wilderness by the Spirit where Satan tempted him for 40 days. Once he recovered Jesus quickly traveled to Galilee to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. There he personally invited some men to drop everything they were doing in order to immediately follow him. And together they went to Capernaum where they saw what a typical day with Jesus would be like.

In a 24-hour period, Jesus does a little teaching in the synagogue, there is an exorcism of an unclean spirit, he heals Simon's mother-in-law and later that evening he heals others who are sick. He casts out more demons before he retires for the evening only to wake up early in the morning to go to a deserted place to pray.

We should all be exhausted just listening to all that Jesus did in one day. But in Mark the details count so we would be wise to back it up to the healing of Simon's mother-in-law. Jesus is in the middle of a very grueling schedule when he takes the time to be fully present with a very sick woman. He leaves the synagogue, enters the house, stands by the bed of this woman, takes her by the hand and lifts her up. He touches her and raises her back to life.

He will do the same thing again in Mark 5 when he leaves the crowds to enter the home of Jairus to touch the hand of his daughter. And again in Mark 9 he will cast out the unclean spirit of a boy suffering seizures and then he will touch his hand and restore him to health.

A touch on the hand by Christ leads to a resurrected life. As we soon gather for our annual meeting, I believe we at Redeemer have been touched by the hand of Christ and we have been restored to health. We are living a resurrected life. We who say we are the hands and feet of Christ try our best to daily walk in his footsteps. We allow our schedules to be interrupted long enough to touch the lives of others. And as we hold them in our grasp we bear witness to them that God sees them and God cares for them and God will give them the strength they need to be renewed.

It is not insignificant the number of times the Scriptures mention the way Christ literally touches people. In this context, touch is a sign of intimacy and of presence. And the faithful response is to get up and serve ... to take our newly resurrected lives to minister to others. Michelangelo used that powerful image when he painted God reaching out his hand to Adam – offering him life. The power of God has been given to us in the form of the Holy Spirit. It is nowhere as brilliant as in his touch.

As followers of Christ we need to open ourselves to those times when our schedules are interrupted or we intentionally take time for others. The God that we met in Isaiah knew our need to have him close so he

sent his Son in human form to show us his love. And it makes it even more daunting for us to realize that for some people, we are the only experience of Jesus some people will ever encounter.

Just a couple of months ago a Jewish man left me a voicemail to share that he passed by the church multiple times in the course of a week and loves reading our messages. With everything going on in the world he appreciated the bold and positive statements of faith. He ended with this: If a Jew can enjoy a message on a Christian marquee then we are in a good place.

There are so many ways to touch the lives of others. But in the end when lives are touched and spirits are raised it is as if Christ himself was present. Amen