

Movement from Darkness to Light

Sermon by Pastor Patrick Fish

February 3-4, 2018

Epiphany 4

Mark 1:29-39

Grace and peace to you from Christ, who through both Word and action, restores and redeems our whole self. Who, through both Word and action, helps us let go of our burdens and lifts us to be free. Amen.

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Move 1: Angels in the sky

As many of you may know, I grew up not too far from here in Oswego. This move back to Illinois is definitely my family and I coming home.

Anyway, one night my parents were putting my brother and I down to bed. And before we jumped into our Ninja Turtle-themed bunk beds, we had to say our prayers.

Well, this one week, I was really struggling. I was being bullied at school and really was having a tough time understanding and rationalizing it with God. So, after we said our regular prayers and my brother went to bed, I asked my mom if she could help explain why God lets bad things happen. Where was God when I was being bullied? What should I do?

My mom paused and said, "Pat, God is always there in the good and the bad. God never causes bad things. In bad times, that's when we need God the most."

Then she said, "Pat, look up. You see those lights in the sky? Those are angels. And they are always looking down on you. When you have a tough time, look up to them and pray. They'll answer your prayer."

Cool. So that night I prayed to the lights. Felt God was with me and would be with me.

The only issue was the following night, when I went to pray to the angels, the lights weren't there. The next night the same thing. Did God leave me?

What I came to find out, the lights only came on during the weekends. God's angels had a good gig. Only working, listening, and responding to prayers on Fridays and Saturdays.

I later learned that those lights my mom alluded to were from the local casino.

My mom loves that story. Always pegs her as such an incredible parent.

To be fair to my mother, now that I'm a parent myself, I now know how exhausted you are at the end of the day. You love your child but, at bedtime, you just want them to go to sleep.

No matter our age—young and old—all of us have, are, and will deal with our fair share of struggles. Ailments. Difficulties. And in times of suffering, the natural questions are: Where is God? What is God doing and what are we to do in those moments?

That's where we pick up Mark's Gospel for today.

Move 2: A new authority in town

Today, we continue navigating through the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Jesus has just finished exorcising a demon in the synagogue. A very public teaching. A very public healing.

And word starts to spread about this guy Jesus. People are starting to realize: He's kinda a big deal. But Jesus is a different kind of big deal. He's not a guy with many leather-bound books with an apartment that smells of rich mahogany.

He's not here for self. He's here for service. He's not here for power. He's here to proclaim and provide action revealing that the Kingdom of God is breaking in. That evil may have had its day. That a new authority, a new power, is here. And here to stay. Here to continually be at odds and intervene against suffering.

Move 3: Freed to love

Jesus leaves a very public setting at the synagogue and enters into the private home of Simon and Andrew. Upon entering this intimate space, he learns of Simon's mother-in-law being ill.

Now, for us today, a fever may not seem like a big deal. But it's important to remember that in a world without antibiotics, a fever was a big deal. And could have serious ramifications.

Jesus sees this woman suffering, has compassion on her, takes her by the hand and lifts her up.

And in an instant, the woman is lifted up. She is raised from her previous condition and made well.

No recovery required. No day of rest needed. Immediately, Simon's mother-in-law is fully healed. And her response? Service.

And as professor and author Karoline Lewis argues, this isn't about the mother pouring coffee and making lunch. This is her response to faith. This is her modeling what it means to be a follower of Christ. This is showing that men and women alike are disciples of Christ.

The mother's response is service. Not serving because she has to. Not serving because it's her lot and role in life. She serves because she's compelled to. She serves because, after letting go and receiving Christ's healing, the only response is service. (*Source: Karoline Lewis, workingpreacher.org*)

But Jesus doesn't stop there. The healings continue.

That evening, everyone from the city comes to the home. Bringing the sick and possessed. And all night, Jesus heals the people brought before him. From dusk until dawn, he lays hands on people and lifts them up from their suffering.

Notice: Jesus doesn't vet any of these people who come to him. He doesn't ask to see proper paperwork to prove they are who they say they are. He doesn't have them fill out a questionnaire seeing if they are deserving of his healing. No, Jesus doesn't have conditions. He doesn't have any requirements we have to meet.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus heals all those who seek him.

Jesus loves freely. Liberates freely. Lifts freely.

What a different world we would have if we lived the same way. If, instead of judging the poor and suffering, instead of expecting from the possessed and sick, we just freely loved. With no conditions. With no requirements.

Move 4: The hurt that lives in all of us

Maybe we struggle to love freely in the world and fail to see the suffering in others because we have a tough time loving ourselves. Because we are going through our own suffering.

Some of us have open wounds that we are navigating in the present. Others of us have scars that are from our past but are always there. The truth is, all of us have been through, or are going through, some struggle.

Young and old, it doesn't matter. All of us experience some form of it.

In those tough times, we ask, "Where is God?" And we learn in Scripture that in the darkness Christ is providing the light we need to navigate through it. He is directly beside us. Not causing the hurt. Not causing the pain. But calling us: "Come to me, all you who are weary, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28, NRSV translation)

What is God doing in those moments? He is seeking after us. Lifting us. Raising us. Restoring us. "I have come not to be served, but to serve. To give my life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45, NRSV translation)

The final question, then, is what do we do in those moments? And the answer is simple: Let go.

Let go of your burdens. Let go of your need to do it by yourself. Let go of your need of control. And hand it all—your worries, your stresses, your burdens—hand it all to Jesus.

Jesus doesn't come out only on weekends. He's providing healing every day. And once we receive his healing, once we are lifted from our darkness, we have no other response but to serve.

Because, once we are lifted, we realize we are freed.

As Martin Luther put it, "As disciples, we are simultaneously freed from all and subject to all." (Martin Luther, *Freedom of a Christian*)

We are freed from all sin. Freed from death. Freed from our demons. But we are also freed to serve. Freed to serve the neighbor.

Move 5: “Free”

To close, I would like us to watch a short clip on the movement that takes place. The movement from suffering to serving. The movement of darkness to experiencing the light of Christ. The movement of receiving and then responding.

[video of “Free” shown]

“Free: Don’t Return to Slavery” by [Journey Box Media](#)

In beautiful symbolism, this mini-movie reveals the impact of miraculous photos taken by a young girl on the lives of broken people. The images and the music (“Beautiful Things” by Gungor) create a powerful reminder that we have been freed from our burdens and forgiven our sins by what Christ did. His grace changes us, moves us from darkness into his everlasting light.

Resources include:

Karoline Lewis, [workingpreacher.org](#)

Matt Skinner, [workingpreacher.org](#)

Martin Luther, *Freedom of a Christian*

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