

**J.j. St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 57th & Broadway, Sacramento, CA
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany-B, February 5, 2012 A.D.**

Mark 1:29-39 29As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

35In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." 38He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." 39And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love. Amen.

Already it's the 5th Sunday after Epiphany?

Epiphany, January 6 – the day that shows us that the baby born at Christmas is Almighty God come to us in the flesh.

Epiphany, "a showing forth", a "manifestation"; kinda like a demonstration; so today is the 5th demonstration of who this Child really is: the newborn King of Israel, Immanuel, God with us.

The baptism of Jesus is the first demonstration in Mark that this plain 30 y.o. Galilean carpenter was none other than Almighty God in human flesh.

Then last Sunday we heard how Jesus taught in the synagogue and cast out a demon; everyone was talking about how He showed His power and taught with authority.

Today's Gospel actually gives us three more manifestations, three more epiphanies.

I wonder, do epiphanies still happen? I have one for you today, but first let's study this text.

Part I, Three Epiphanies Show Us Fevered, Sick and Demon-Possessed People

Point 1. We can be sick and fevered and still not look for Jesus

Was Peter's mother-in-law looking for Jesus when He happened to drop in?

When He left the synagogue in Capernaum did Peter phone ahead and say, "we'll be there for lunch, just 13 of us." ? ? ?

No, when they got to her house, they found her in bed with a fever.

What an awkward social moment! The lady of the house too sick to wait on them and fix lunch!

So the others in the house did the right thing: "...they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them." (NRSV)

St. Jerome, in his commentary on this passage, wrote: "Can you imagine Jesus standing before your bed and you continue sleeping? ... Where is Jesus? He is already here offering Himself to us. 'In the middle,' John says, 'among you He stands, whom you do not recognize.'"

[*Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, NT, Vol. II, "Mark" p. 24.*]

That's our problem – we don't recognize our Lord even when He stands in the middle of life. But what an epiphany to Simon Peter's mother-in-law! What a manifestation of God's power!

Point 2. We can be sick and possessed by demons and still not look in the right places for help.

32 When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. (NASB)

"...they began bringing ... all" I don't know who "they" is right here, but I hope it was our Lord's 12 followers, who saw – what do we call it today? – an "outreach moment."

The point I see is that the sick had to be brought – they didn't know where to go for help.

Let me tell you a true story about a young Lutheran boy.

His name is David, and he went to Our Savior's Lutheran church every Sunday in SW Minnesota where at age 16 he was confirmed. A few years later he left the farm life and

headed for LA. Why? What was he missing? Well, in LA he made the music scene, and that scene then was, I think, acid rock. He succeeded – in fact he became one of the founding members of the group called “Megadeth,” a ‘heavy metal’ band. Well, fame and fortune followed with albums like “Countdown to Extinction” and “Symphony of Destruction.” Then also followed alcohol, drugs and sex and whatever else for this nice young Lutheran boy in LA. What was he looking for? I listened to a couple tracks of their work, like “Never Dead”, and I couldn’t take more than 30 seconds of what they call “thrash metal.”

It reminded me of the people here in Mark who were demon-possessed.
Is that perhaps how to describe the young people of today who were all on their feet jumping to the beat of the bass line? – btw, David played the bass guitar – Demon-possessed?
What are they looking for? Just entertainment?
What are we looking for when we are running from our own demons and want to find a way out?
What are we looking for when life has lost its meaning and we are sick and very low – where do we turn?

Point 3. When it is very dark where do we turn?

35 In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left *the house*, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. (NASB)

I think I’d be reading something into this text if I’d say that “still dark” describes the condition of the people here, but yet it does remind me of the root malady which is pictured elsewhere in Holy Scripture as darkness.

E.g. John 1:4 “In Him [Jesus] was ... the light.... 5The Light shines in the darkness....”
Darkness describes a world lost and far away from its Heavenly Maker.

For example, did you know that since 1954, the year that I was ordained, for 58 years it has been illegal for pastors to influence elections from the pulpit?
Free speech seems to be protected everywhere in the U.S. except when it comes to sermons.
By contrast, Scholar James Hutson, author of *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic*, states “that freedom from Great Britain would not have been won without the black-robed colonial preachers, who ... assured their pious countrymen, from the beginning of the [fight with England], that the resistance movement was right in God’s sight and had His blessing....” (*impact*, Feb. 2012, p.2.)
In the darkness of the political process today, many freedoms in our once free country have been lost. When it is very dark, where do we turn?

OK, just to recap – our problem is:

Point 1. We can be sick and fevered and still not look for Jesus

Point 2. We can be sick and possessed by demons and still not look in the right places for help.

Point 3. When it is very dark where do we turn?

Our Lord Jesus knew where to turn in the darkness of that early morning hour – in that secluded place He was praying.

Part II. Today’s Epiphanies show us a Savior who seeks us in the darkness.

Point 1. Here is the third epiphany in today’s Gospel.

When [the disciples] found [Jesus], they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” He answered, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.” And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons. (NRSV)

After our Lord’s demonstrations of power in healing the sick and driving out demons – who, btw, knew who he was – people were clamoring for more, more, more.
Perhaps they wanted to build a clinic and just keep this miracle man right there.

But Jesus was moving on – He had further manifestations to make.

What He had come out to do was to proclaim – *Nota Bene*: “the message.”

And so, we read, “...he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message....”

The word for ‘proclaim a message’ in Greek is the verbal form of “KERYGMA” which is a synonym for the gospel.

One writer puts it this way: **“‘Kerygmatic’ is sometimes used to express the message of Jesus’ whole ministry, as ‘a proclamation addressed not to the theoretical reason, but to the hearer as a self.’”** (*Rudolph Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, London 1960.*)

Early in this Ch. 1, Mark quotes Jesus’ message. His sermon, His proclamation, His KERYGMA goes like this:

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (v. 15)

So this is the third epiphany in today’s Gospel reading, a showing forth of the message of the gospel, the kerygma.

It says that God kept, and keeps, His promises.

“The time is fulfilled” – “in the fulness of time” – “when the time had fully come”: these are all New Testament introductions to the ministry of Jesus Christ, a ministry which, at the last, found Him, dying, upon a cross.

Therefore we should repent and believe the good news that He died for us, in our stead, and thus our sins are forgiven.

Point 2. Our Savior does seek us in our darkness and renews our faith.

Remember David in LA? He once believed the KERYGMA. Now here’s the rest of the story.

David Ellefson, bassist for Megadeth, finally had enough drugs and alcohol and whatever.

His lifestyle caught up with him, and he went to rehab and began a 12 step program.

There he was reintroduced to his Savior, Jesus, and he embraced his long forgotten faith.

He moved to Arizona, married and started a family, and joined a Missouri Synod Lutheran Church. He said, now age 47, “I came from a good family, not a broken home. That became a model for me, and I saw church at center of it.” He was asked to help with the music in a contemporary worship service, and he began composing again, this time using Old Testament texts.

Where he once sang words like these:

Mean and infectious the evil prophets rise
Dance of the Macabre as witches streak the sky
Decadent worship of black magic sorcery
In the womb of the Devil's Dungeon trapped without a
plea" (whatever **that** means),

[“The Skull Beneath the Skin” from the album, Killing Is My Business ... And Business Is Good”, 1985]

now he is enrolled in Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, my alma mater, to become a pastor in the Lutheran Church. (Cf. *Tim Townsend, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Jan. 19, 2012*)

Is that not a modern manifestation, an epiphany, of saving power?

Today, our Savior still seeks the lost. He is still on the move to another town, another city.

Peter’s mother-in-law got up from her fever, strong and well, and served our Lord and his 12.

How can you and I serve? If epiphanies of His healing grace are seen today in the life of a heavy metal rock stars, how can we serve, where else can we proclaim the KERYGMA?

We may be weary of trying, but Isaiah reminds us in our first lesson today, ch.40, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; 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 the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.