

“In Fever’s Grip”

Mark 1:29-39

The Fifth Sunday Following the Epiphany

5 February, 2006

the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

[Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church](#)

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.

Prayer.

We would like to think that the
Gospel is
Unchanging
Everlasting
Absolute truth;
The reflection of an immortal,
indivisible God.

This fundamentalist
Inerrant
approach to the Word
Appeals to those who do not desire
to think
To reflect
To be open to the movement
And revelation

of the Holy Spirit.
If the Gospel was singular
One dimensional
The masses would remain content
To have the gospel spoon-fed to
them
By the Pope
or the Jerry Falwell’s and Pat
Robertson’s of the world.
“This is the way it is
And that is that.
Anyone who questions the way it is
Is to be thrown into the outer
darkness
Where there is pain and suffering
and gnashing of teeth.”
The danger, of course,
Is the corrupted, sinful, political

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nature of the interpreter
The one doing the interpreting
- present company *included* -
Whose ambition and ego
always
Precludes all credibility.

The thoughtful disciple of Christ
Is responsible for more.
The Word of God is alive!
It is alive in the cultural details
In the creative lens
of everyone who has ever had the
joy of experiencing it.
The rich nature of our beliefs and
values
Of gender and ethnic origins
Of homes, childhood, education, and
experiences
Allow the Gospel to achieve a rich
and fruitful texture
That moves the text off the page
And breaths life into the words
The way God means it to be.

For the faithful disciple of Christ
We are responsible for more.
Disciples are expected to be
progressive in nature;
That is, always growing
Always drawing nearer
To the heart and mind of Jesus
Christ.
It is not enough to be forgiven and
saved.
Faith is a journey
Winding like a river
From source to sea
- as Wesley would say -
calling us onward to perfection
being sanctified into
God's eternal kingdom.

The growing disciple of Christ
Is responsible for still more.

Disciples are expected
to be receptive to,
and in relationship with,
the movement of the Holy Spirit.
New revelations await those who
Remain attune to the Spirit's gentle
wind.

Insight and depth come through
The still, small voice within.
The spiritual disciple of Christ
Takes part in the give and take
The action and reaction
Of a relationship with the Divine.

Those who discount culture,
deepening faith, and the work of the
Spirit just don't get it, and probably
will not grow beyond the first step of
conversion. Sadly, this is a growing
state of American Christianity and
the world in which we live.

It is important to look at our Gospel
for this day
Through the lens of classical
theology:
The scholar Reginal Fuller
Outlines the issue this way
"Jesus regards his miracles
as only a subordinate feature
of his ministry.
His main purpose is to preach
the good news of the coming
kingdom.
What role, then, do the
miracles play in Mark?
They are now seen as
prefigurations
of the ultimate messianic
miracle,
which is the cross and the
resurrection."¹

Let that sink in for a moment.
One view
Is through the lens of

Ministry, which leads to
Evangelism, which is all supported
by
The atonement of Christ for our sins
And
The sanctification of Christ for the
saving of our souls.
For Fuller and his neo-orthodox
post-modernists
The miracle plays second fiddle
To the only one true gospel
essential:
Jesus crucified and risen from the
dead.
This is good news
Unless you are the one with a fever.

It is important to look at our Gospel
for this day
Through the lens of contemporary
theology:
The scholar Sarah Dylan Breuer
Adds this perspective:

Consider Simon Peter's
mother-in-law
She is living with Peter.
Why?
Logic suggests that she is a
widow.
A widow without sons
Otherwise she would be living
with the eldest son.
Instead, she is living with
Simon Peter.
Where is her daughter?
Is Simon Peter a widower
himself?
When Jesus calls Simon
Peter
He not only leaves his fishing
nets behind
He leaves his dependent
Mother-in-Law behind, too!

But we know better.
Jesus is not so cold

To leave others behind to their own
ends.
Jesus heals her of her fever
Restores her to her fullest potential.
Dylan Breuer overcomes
Initial feminist complaints
And comes to the point where she
writes:

Mark makes very clear that
when Jesus proclaims the
message, it's not just sharing
words; it's healing and freeing
people so that they can form
communities that heal and
free people.²

Healing and freedom:
Healing from fever's grip
Freedom to become autonomous,
A self-supporting
Disciple of Christ
Whose only dependence
Is now a complete dependence upon
God and his grace.

It is important to look at our Gospel
for this day
Through the lens of the ancient
Church fathers.
Peter Chrysologus, Bishop of
Ravenna
Who lived in the fourth Century
And was known for his eloquent
ability to preach
Had many of his sermons written,
preserved, and translated.
He looked at our Gospel for this
morning
And saw something altogether
different:
He looks at Peter's mother-in-law
And he sees a person
A person held near death
In a struggle
Quickly progressing towards death.
Chrysologus sees the healing touch

As the intersection between
the earthly and the Divine;
Where healing takes place
and saves a woman's life.
He hints at metaphor when he
writes:

Fever loosens its grip on a
person whose hand is held by
Christ's.³

Healing comes when
Jesus touches this ill woman,
When he takes her by the hand
And restores her to wholeness and
life.

What a wonderful metaphor
For the healing nature of Holy
Communion.
Washed in baptismal waters
We approach this sacred meal
As if we are responding to the
extended hand of Christ:
Tasting the bread
Touching his hand
Tasting the wine
Being healed
Being made whole again
Being perfected
Completely transformed and
regenerated by God's amazing
grace.

Three different lenses.
Yet, there are so many more that can
be mined;
Three different lenses
Of one Word;
This richness
Leads us further
Draws us closer
Reveals to us more deeply
The mind
The heart
And the soul
Of The Word

Jesus Christ.

The movement of the Holy Spirit is
reflected in these words. To God be
the glory! Amen.

¹ Reginald H. Fuller. Preaching the Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today

² Online Blog, by Dr. Sarah Dylan Breuer, P.O. Box 3055 Frederick, MD 21705-3055 U.S.A.

³ Sermon 18: PL 52, 246-49, Peter Chrysologus, Bishop of Ravenna, d. 450. Pious, zealous, and a renowned speaker--thus the name "Chrysologus".