

Mark 1:29-39

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany

Feb. 6, 2000

Why am I still alive? I couldn't begin to tell you how many times I have heard that question asked as I have been visiting older members of the churches I have served. When a younger person has died recently – a son or granddaughter or niece the question sounds like this: Why didn't God take me instead of her? I've lived my life – she has a family that needs her. Listening to those words I hear the love in them, the pain of sorrow, the bewilderment.

Sometimes the question is spoken by one who is suffering and in extreme pain. “Why am I still alive? I am ready to go and be with Jesus.”

But far too often I hear a lament that sounds like this: “Why am I alive? I have nothing to live for.” In nursing homes, in living rooms, in hospitals people speak of a life that no longer contributes, is no longer connected, is no longer serving. One gray day drifts into another. Life is simply a waiting for the end.

I know how it is in me when I start to feel that way – I am the only thing that is important to me, the only one I am thinking about, the only one I am interested in. Me, me, me, from morning to night – me.

One thing that I have noticed is that self pity and self absorption have little to do with outward circumstances. As far as I can see the person who asks, “Why am I still alive?” may be mostly healthy – some aches and pains – but not as bad off as many others. But when my whole attention is turned in on me perspective is lost.

It happens to teenagers – healthy, strong, a whole lifetime ahead – but when me is all I am worried about – all I am living for – life can turn gray. No joy, no hope, no living.

Today's gospel reading offers a snapshot of how things were around Jesus. First he went with Simon and Andrew, James and John, to Simon's house. His mother-in-law was sick with a fever. They told him about her at once. These words are a little hint about following Jesus. People who follow Jesus bring the needs of others to Jesus' attention. They told him about her at once.

I hope you are doing the same. Not just prayer chain people among you, but every one of you – young and old and in between. Bring the needs of others to Jesus’ attention. Pray. Be specific. If someone you know is facing a difficult decision – talk to Jesus about her. Ask for help for her, for guidance.

If someone you know is going down the wrong road, talk to Jesus about him. Ask for understanding and insight for yourself, for compassion.

If there is good news that you hear, thank God for it. For every moment of health, and every bit of love that others give.

Pray for this congregation that Jesus will guide us all. Pray that we will not get turned in on ourselves, thinking only about our needs and our wants but that we will be renewed in love and in service. Pray we will be like Simon’s mother-in-law. For we read: Jesus came, took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her and she began to serve them.

I like that word, “began.” Her serving was not a moment’s deed but I think would become a way of life. Healed by Jesus, helped by Jesus, she turned her attention to the needs of others.

As a people of God we have certainly been blessed. The help and the healing and the hope that God has provided have been abundant. As the first lesson promises the Lord has renewed your strength, you have mounted up with wings like eagles, you have run and not been wearied, walked and have not fainted. So much to be thankful for, so much to share. I trust that like Simon’s mother-in-law the members of this congregation have only begun to serve.

As we continue reading we hear that that evening, at sundown, they brought to Jesus all who were sick or possessed by demons.

There is no end to the people we can bring to Jesus. Instead of complaining about a troublesome neighbor bring that troublesome neighbor to Jesus in prayer, startle that troublesome neighbor with acts of kindness, share Jesus with that neighbor in your words and your deeds.

Pray for the ones at school who are heading down the wrong road. Each day pray for them. Pray that God will show you a way to be help for them. Pray.

Pay attention to the homes on your street where children are at home on Sunday mornings. Invite them to Sunday school. Bring them to Sunday school. Bring them to Jesus.

Most of the time when someone says, “Why am I still alive?” I just listen. A life that has been trained in being only concerned about self will not be rescued by any wise words from me. But if you don’t want to end up the one imprisoned in your own self absorption begin this day to live in a new way. Pray – bring others to Jesus in prayer and in person – a day will never come when you will be wondering why God gives you breath. For as long as you have breath and a mind that can understand, you will never run out of people to bring to Jesus.