

5th Sunday Epiphany B 12

February 4, 2012

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.
Amen.

Who are you this day? Do you need help or do you need to help? Are you in need of care or are you in need of a calling? Are you in need of restoration to life or are you refreshed after having been restored? These are the questions that kept arising from my readings this week. Our lessons today are filled with people in need of care, in need of healing, in need of restoration so they might fulfill their calling in life.

Isaiah was writing to a people who were in exile and have been for many generations. They kept praying and hoping for the restoration of the kingdom, they kept looking for and not seeing that God was at work in the world. So they started to doubt and to wonder if their God had forgotten them or at least stopped listening to them. Isaiah lifted up for them the promise that God was at work, reminding them of the great and marvelous things their Creator has done since the beginning of time.

Here are a people in great need to be lifted up, to be cared for and to be restored in their faith. Here was a community in need of being healed and restored as a community for the sake of the one who called them his own. Isaiah reminds them, *'the lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.*

Here Isaiah brings the people a word of hope and promise because they have a God who is active and who walks with them and one day will join them on their journey. Yet in the mean time they are called to wait. But this waiting is not passively sitting around doing nothing, this waiting is an active verb calling them to respond to the needs of the community, of raising up those in need so they might be cared for by those with means and a calling to do so. This waiting is about restoring them as a community and as the people of God. For in their waiting God will take them from their weakness and restore their strength so they might soar become an example of Gods great power for the world see and follow.

In the Gospel of Mark we continue to witness the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Last week Jesus had a very public confrontation with the man possessed in the synagogue whom he healed and restored to full health. Now later that same day as Jesus and the disciples enter the house of Simon and Andrew, Jesus is told of the fever possessing Simon's mother in law. Jesus quietly and privately heals the woman and restores her to health then in response she gets up to serve them.

Now I do not want to give the impression that it is always the woman's status or job in life to serve men. While it may have been true in that culture we can better understand this healing of Simon's mother in law as a restoration to health as a restoration of her calling in life. In her society it was the woman of the household to ensure hospitality when guest arrived. Her illness kept her from fulfilling her calling to welcome and care for her guests.

Is that so different from our culture? Even in our culture we are mostly known by the work that we do and the position we hold in society. When we are unable to fulfill that position in life, ether due to illness, or lack of work or for whatever reason we are not able to fulfill our calling society often looks down upon us, treats us as something less than before. Most of the time it is due to illness or other factors beyond our control, so in Jesus healing Simon's mother in law, in raising her up, he restores her to her position and to her calling in life.

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Our world is fast paced with pressures to accomplish more and more each day. With that pressure we push ourselves to work harder and harder. Then when an illness or other disruption comes into our daily life we too become in need of healing and restoration. Often that healing comes within the quiet times we spend in prayer and with rest. It comes with the help and assistance of other faithful people around us who are living out their calling of service. It comes in the belief and trust that we have a God who is with us and who lifts us up and restores us to health so we can resume our place in society and continue our calling in life.

Where might you be this morning? Are the in need of healing or in need of helping others? Are you the one who needs to be restored or are you rested so you might help restore others? Even for the best of us there comes those days when we are feeling low or lonely or lost and we need the word of hope and promise to lift us up. Then following those days is when we can soar on the strength of being restored and fully living out our calling in life to lift up others.

The second half of our gospel reading is one that makes always makes a connection for me in life. Jesus had just spent the day teaching in the synagogue, casting out demons, healing many who were brought to him. There Jesus not only healed them but reinstated them back into society, restored them to their calling in life. It is no wonder that Jesus became tired, exhausted in need of care, of rest and restoration for his journey ahead. The next verse says, *'while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place and there he prayed.'* In the Gospel of Mark we will get reminded again and again that Jesus leaves and goes off to a quiet place to pray, to be in conversation and community with God.

So how might we who are strengthened and renewed go about our calling of serving others? Here we look at the Apostle Paul and his ministry to the churches he founded. In Corinthians, Paul was working to restore and rebuild a community that was being fractured. Here Paul is answering his critics that he was not standing firm enough or that selling out his own position in life. But Paul responds by saying, *'I have become all things to all people so that I might by any means save some.'* That is I am a Jew to reach out to the Jews, I am outside the law to reach out to those outside the law and I am weak to reach out to the weak so that everyone might understand we have a Savior who understands what it means to be who we are. Most shocking in Paul's writing to his hearers was that he would become like those outside the law or to become like the weak. But in each case Paul chose to enter into their world for the sake of the gospel.

For Paul this was not being simply relative to the people he was trying to reach, or to assimilate them into the greater community. It was about a different and radical way of life to walk with them, to walk in their shoes in order to lift them up and give them a calling in life. For Paul it may be just play acting as a way to reach everyone with the Good News of Jesus.

For us it is just not Paul who sets the example of what it means to walk along side others in order to proclaim the Gospel. For it was Christ who came down to earth, who took human form and walked along side us so we might know God's love. Jesus came to serve, to heal us, to lift us up and to restore us to health so we might fulfill our calling in life to serve others in his name.

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AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

Pastor Michael