

Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time -- Feb. 6-7, 2021

There is an old and funny little anecdote that goes something like this. An elderly man who was quite ill said to his wife, "You know, Sarah, you've always been with me – through the good and the bad. Like the time I lost my job – you were right there by my side. And when the war came, and I enlisted – you became a nurse so that you could be with me. Then I was wounded, and you were there, Sarah, right by my side. Then the Depression hit, and we had nothing – but you were there with me. And now here I am, sick as a dog, and, as always, you're right beside me. You know something, Sarah -- you're a jinx! You always bring me bad luck!" There is a part of us that is tempted to look for somebody else to blame for all the things that go wrong in our lives.

Is there anyone among us who has not at some time felt overwhelmed like, Job, by all the hits that life can put on us? Most of us will eventually face some kind of suffering or serious setback in life. Job expresses the meaninglessness that many people feel in the face of life's trials.

The book of Job is a reflection on the meaning of suffering in life. At first the view was that when bad things happen to people it is because they have sinned. But as time went on, this explanation doesn't really add up. The book of Job attempts to answer the question: if God is loving, then why does evil exist? And why do bad things happen to good people?

The book of Job starts out with Job, a very and faithful and good man, enjoying many blessings of family, land and livestock. Then he loses everything including his health. Finally, at the end God restores everything to him and more. ----- As we go through the book of Job, we see Job go through different responses to his losses and sufferings. In the section that we read today, Job doesn't blame God but he looks at life as having a lot of suffering and misery that we just have to accept as it is. Later he sees suffering as something that we that just really do not have the answer to. It is not simply that "everything happens for a reason." (Sometimes there seems to be no reason.) Rather, we just have the truth that suffering happens in this life and that God, for his part is always faithfully with us. As today's

psalm said – “Praise the Lord who heals the broken-hearted.”

Jesus, himself, is totally innocent and yet suffers greatly all through his life, and as we see in today’s Gospel, has come into this world to be with us in our suffering and to take up our suffering. So we see that God is there in our darkness and suffering and brings order to the struggles of our life through the presence of his son Jesus. In today’s Gospel we are also reminded how Jesus restores himself. “Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed. Throughout the gospels, we see Jesus dealing with all he endured in the same way: He went to the Father in prayer. We know our own need for prayer and quiet moments in the midst of many demands. Jesus demonstrates that this need is not a weakness but a necessity.

We also have the example of Paul who in today’s readings exemplifies what a disciple is. Paul imitates Christ by reaching out to those in need without cost. Paul is so convinced of the Gospel message that he will do anything and suffer anything to share it with others.

We see the Good News of that Jesus brings and creates in today’s Gospel After leaving the synagogue where he has exorcised a man with a demon, he goes to the nearby house of Peter, probably to have a meal. There he finds that Peter’s mother-in-law is ill and in bed, but he heals her and immediately gets up and waits on them. Then, after sunset when the Sabbath is over the whole town gathers at the door of the house. (They waited until sundown because it would have been against the Sabbath to do the work of carrying someone to him.)

What we see is that Jesus walks into a typical town filled with suffering, sickness and people struggling with evil—not unlike our own communities.. He then both announces and creates good news. He begins by healing a woman with a fever, and before long He has healed many sick people and driven out countless demons. It is good news when Jesus comes to town. He turns a struggling little community into a joyful place of health, and happiness.

The transformation of this village of Simon and Andrew into a new town with new life begins with someone putting

their hand into Jesus' hand. It was not just a handshake; it was an expression of total trust in Jesus by Peter's mother-in-law. When we let go of everything that we are holding on to for meaning and hope in life, and we instead hold on to Jesus, and only him, then Good News for ourselves and our town will begin.

It is a good thing when Jesus comes to town and it is a blessing when chooses not to stay in that one town but to move on and share or offer the same blessings to other towns. After taking time for prayer, Jesus is again clear in his mission. From town to town he must go --- teaching that God is calling his people and is here for them. Nothing else matters as much. This is what he came to do. Mark, in his Gospel, seems to be saying that while time for rest and prayer is necessary, the needs of the kingdom call for Jesus' immediate attention. There is little time for rest when the kingdom must be preached and the sick are to be healed.

Jesus moved on and he continues to move on today, offering eternal life and healing to all who choose to believe in him and follow him. That is what brings us here today. We believe that he is the way to God, so in faith we offer ourselves to him and ask him to walk with us as we make our journey through this life.

A question to think about as we go forth this week is: if we were to come before Jesus as did the people of Capernaum, what would we ask him to heal? And, if we were to bring someone to Jesus for healing, who might that be?