

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany – Lectionary 5
5:30 p.m. Saturday, February 4, 2012
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39

Grace to you and peace from God who was, who is, and who is to come. Amen.

Some of you might remember a few weeks ago, when our Youth Director, Peter Fox, and his spouse Lorena, were here at Saturday worship, for the baptism of their son Kiva And Peter's father, Rev. Hal Fox, pastor at Trinity Lutheran in Steelton, was here, and not only presided at his grandson Kiva's baptism, but he also preached the sermon. While I have known Pastor Fox for a few years, that was the first time I had ever heard him preach. And if you were here that evening, and remember his message, you may well of had the same kind of a reaction that I did. (I have to pause here for a minute and say that I often have a very difficult time listening to someone else preach, not because I'm thinking 'Oh, I'm so much better than this person.' Nope. Usually, I'm thinking oh, that was a really good point. Or where's he going to go from here? Or how is she going to tie that into the lesson? Or I need to remember that illustration and use it sometime. And I most generally have to tell myself Shut Up, and Listen to the message.) (I'm filling in for Pastor Fox tomorrow, he's off on vacation, that's part of the reason I'm talking about him.) As I read our lesson from First Corinthians for tonight, and I thought about the way that Pastor Fox seemed to kind of bounce around a whole bunch of different points that didn't seem to be related, and then at the end he tied them all together; that's kind of what Paul is doing in this letter to the Corinthians. He's talking about things that don't seem to be connected with anything else, with this talk of rewards, and being all things to all people, and then we try to tie this in with our gospel reading and Jesus healing people and casting demons out, let me try to connect these. Let me first try to put them into context.

Paul is writing to the congregation in Corinth. Corinth is a reestablished port/trading city. It's populated primarily by freed slaves, or gentiles, these are folk who have **earned** their freedom, **bought** their freedom, and they hold onto their freedom - their citizenship - more fiercely than a Revolutionary War Minute Man. Paul understands that love of freedom. And he agrees with it. To a point. This whole section of the letter, chapters 8, 9 & 10, Paul focuses on food, and the worship of false gods. Paul talks to the Corinthians about how to live out our Freedom in Christ, with the Authority Christ gives to all of us, and The Rights of being a Christian; In other words, what does it **mean** to a dedicated follower of Jesus from Nazareth?

We kind of do ourselves a disservice when we only look at that little snippet we got in our reading tonight, when we so NOT reading this section in its entirety, and we really struggle because we leave out the first fifteen verses of this chapter. If you remember the reading from last week: Paul talks about that while we as believers

in and followers **of** Christ Jesus are free to eat whatever we want (because we are **not** hampered by the Law of Moses dietary restraints, NOR are we restricted to NOT eat food previously offered as sacrifice to false idols, or false gods, any of the Greek Pantheon). We, as believers **in** and followers **of** Christ Jesus, ARE constrained by how we will be understood, not only by non-believers, but also, and MAINLY, by those who Are believers, but whose faith is not as strong as ours.

This continues throughout ALL aspects of our lives, Paul says, not just about food. So, Paul says, if living like a Jew is the only way to get the message of Jesus as messiah to Jews, then, says Paul, I'll live like a Jew. If living like a Gentile is the only way to get the message of Jesus as the one who gives structure in a chaotic world, then, says Paul, I'll live as a Gentile. Maybe we can try to put this in more modern terms: If living like a Democrat is the only way to get the message that Jesus wants us to be independent, self-supportive and successful, then I'll live as a Democrat. If living like a Republican is the only way to get the message that Jesus calls all of us to give everything we have to help one another, then I'll live as a Republican. In other words, in order to get across the message of Christ's love and forgiveness, we need to talk to people in words and actions that they can understand can **hear**, and live our lives in a manner in which others can **see**, Christ at work.

Which is part of what I think is going on in the gospel reading. Mark's gospel is a great gospel. It's the shortest of the four, only sixteen chapters, and I have it on good authority from a former Affirmation of Baptism student that you can read the entire gospel in one hour. Which he did, one Sunday, during worship (and no, it wasn't one of my sons). In Matthew and Luke's gospel, we start off with Jesus being born, and then they both take a couple of chapters to get things moving. In John's gospel, he goes all the way back to creation, and even though things pick up pretty quickly, it's a little difficult to catch on because of the lofty language John uses.

That's not the case in Mark. In Mark's gospel, everything is immediate, it's happening Right Now. We start off - BAM! - with John the Baptizer and his call to repentance, and then BAM! Jesus is baptized. The sky is ripped open, the disembodied voice cries out "This is my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased." (1:11) Then BAM! Immediately Jesus is out in the wilderness, being tempted. After which, John is arrested, Jesus calls the twelve, and BAM! We're into our reading for today.

Mark gives us this great story of Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law. I know there's this joke among pastors that, of course Jesus healed her; they were all hungry and wanted something to eat. I think this reading is more along the lines of a grandmother you know, where you couldn't go over to her house without being offered something to eat, and she was offended if you didn't eat. And you couldn't leave her home without taking a plate of something - cookies, pie, bread. there are those people in this life who truly like to make certain everyone has enough to eat every family has somebody like this grandma favorite aunt whoever. That is what

their calling is: to be of service to others; to make certain everyone, or at least everyone within their reach, has something to eat.

When Jesus reaches out, and touches, this feverous woman, to make her whole, to make her well, to make her able to get up and serve; he really wasn't supposed to do that. This is a woman; he's a man. This is a woman to whom he is NOT related. This is a woman who is ill, feverous. Those are three very strong, very strict reasons that he should NOT have touched her; yet he does. He reaches out. He heals her. He makes her whole. His healing of her allows her to do that which she most loves to do: in her case, serve others.

The thing I did not catch all the other times I've read through our gospel lesson for tonight, however, is the fact that by healing *her*, Peter's mother-in-law allows Jesus to do what *he* most wants to do. And so that act of healing, (we could almost say, that forbidden act of healing) allows Jesus the opportunity to do that which he most wanted to do: heal the sick, and cast out demons. All of which he does nearly to the point of exhaustion because before dawn, he's out by himself, praying and when the disciples find him, did you notice what Jesus' response was? *"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."* (V.38) Jesus wanted to do that which he was called to do. Just as Peter's mother-in-law wanted to do what she was called to do: she was called to serve; he was called to heal.

It may seem in our own life that there is lot that seems unconnected, not related one part to another. Perhaps your employment does not really seem to have any bearing on your family other than as a paycheck to provide for mortgage food clothing education, or entertainment. Maybe you're trying to keep your school life totally separate from home, or church. What I believe we need to remember is all those separate parts of our life work together to make us who we are. If we try to keep them separate, away from each other, it's almost as if we're at battle within ourselves.

Going out for the school play in 8th grade, I did not have in mind that it would help me be comfortable in front of groups of people; but being in the play in 8th grade did. I didn't continue with theater in high school and college thinking that I could better experience how someone else thinks by pretending to be another person; but it often times does help me. Paul says God gives us the freedom to act however we want to act, AND God reigns us in to live as God calls us to. We are free, and yet we are restrained.

Jesus stepped outside the box of rules and regulations to bring health to a woman, someone with whom he was not supposed to have contact. Yet by doing so, he was able to **fulfill** the Law by healing those people who were suffering and came to him.

This Christian life that we live, is almost at times a split way of living that almost might seem to be at odds with itself. Yet the *one thing* that is the same through it all of our calling, through all of our life as believers, through all that we do as a

Christian, the one thing that is constant, is God's call to us: to Live Faithfully; to Serve God, and to Love Others.

AMEN.

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