

**Mark 1: 29-39****The Miracle of the Forgiveness of Sins**

We have arrived at the 5<sup>th</sup> weekend in the season of Epiphany. The Epiphany season traditionally falls between two major events wherein God the Father announces that Jesus is His beloved Son. The first occurs at Jesus' baptism. The second occurs at His Transfiguration. The weeks between these two events reveal the truth that Jesus is the long-promised Savior of the world, who has fulfilled all of Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah, and perfectly kept God's Law for us. During the season of Epiphany the Scripture lessons open our hearts and minds to the purpose for which Jesus came. They reveal to us the divinity of Jesus as He goes about Galilee, Judea, and Samaria preaching and teaching the message of God's kingdom, which is God's message of forgiveness of sins and salvation for all who believe.

Jesus came proclaiming the good news of the Gospel not only in words, but also in His healing of the sick, the lame, the blind, the deaf and dumb, and by driving out demons, as He did in last week's Gospel lesson. This week's Gospel lesson continues where we left off last week. The worship service is over and Peter invites Jesus, Andrew, James, and John to his house for the Sabbath meal. The Scriptures tell us that as soon as they arrive at Peter's house everyone lets Jesus know that Peter's mother-in-law was gravely ill with a fever. Her fever must have been really bad for her to still be lying in bed when guests arrived at her home. Even though it was Peter's house and her daughter was married to Peter, she would have felt duty bound to get up off her sick bed and tend to the needs of Peter and his guests. Clearly, this lady was really sick, and due to the lack of adequate medical facilities and treatment options she could have easily died.

As soon as Jesus heard of her ailment He went immediately to her side. The same Jesus, who with nothing more than the power of His authoritative word commanded the demons to leave that poor man in the synagogue in last week's Gospel lesson, now stretches out His hand and touches Peter's mother-in-law, and she is immediately healed. He speaks not a word. Instead, He gently takes her by the hand, lifts her up, and the fever instantly leaves her.

Now, if you are thinking this was a miracle, you are right. But what Jesus did is much more than a miraculous healing of the body. Our text says the fever "left" her. The root word from the Greek that is translated in our text as "left" is the same word Jesus uses whenever He speaks of the forgiveness of sins – ἀφίημι (ah-fee-ay-mi). It means "*to forgive.*"

Whether we realize it or not, all sickness and disease of the body, mind, and spirit is the result of sin. There are any number of things that may cause us to become ill in body, mind and spirit, but the root cause of all our sickness can be traced to the brokenness of the world caused by Adam and Eve's sin of disobedience against God in the Garden of Eden. In their sin, we all fell from grace, and all creation has been suffering ever since, which means that we become ill, our bodies and minds malfunction, decay, and die for one reason – we are all sickened by the deadly disease of sin.

In the healing of Peter's mother-in-law Jesus shows us the cure for what truly ails us. The cure that Jesus offers, and desires to give to each of us, is the same cure He gave to Peter's mother-in-law, His aphiami -- His forgiveness for sin. For with the bestowal of Christ's medicine of forgiveness comes the cure for sin and its deadly affects. By His mercifully touch of forgiveness the fever of sin departs and your soul is healed.

And where do we go to receive this healing medicine for the soul? We go to God's hospital for sin-sick souls; the Church. For each time we gather in worship, our Savior applies His healing balm of forgiveness for souls that are sickened by sin. Every Lord's Day we begin the Divine Service confessing our sins and asking our heavenly Father to forgive our sin-sick lives. Week after week we come before the Great Physician of both body and soul seeking the healing that comes from His grace and mercy. And because He is gracious and merciful, He lovingly renders His Divine Service to us by granting the healing medicine of forgiveness for our sins we so desperately need. But one wonders, do we actually grasp the reality of the miracle God works in our lives through the healing medicine He applies in the Confession and Absolution, or do we receive it like a placebo as we go through the motions of the liturgy?

There's a reason the directions in the liturgy invite us to kneel before we confess our sins to God. In the confession of our sins we, like Peter's mother-in-law, lie sick in the bed of our sins, helpless and unable to stand before our Lord. And because He knows your great need for healing, your Savior lovingly comes to you with His Holy Absolution. As He speaks to you through the voice of the pastor, He comes and touches you with His aphiami, His healing medicine of forgiveness for your sins. And just as the fever left that weak, frail, suffering woman lying on her sickbed, so the fever of your sin that sickened your soul, departs from you as He lifts you up, and strengthens your faith and your soul.

Yes, in the Confession and Absolution, spoken and declared by the pastor in the stead and by the command of your Savior, Jesus works a miraculous, life-saving, healing in you.

Now, if it is true that the Great Physician can be found in His Church, one has to wonder why people aren't lining up outside the doors of the Lord's house so He can work His miraculous healing in their lives. One has to wonder why so many of God's people are late for church, week after week, seemingly uninterested in receiving Christ's miraculous gift of forgiveness for their sins and healing for their soul. Perhaps, like the crowd in Capernaum, they don't really understand who Jesus is or why He came. Many people are looking for a miracle worker Jesus who will give them whatever they ask for, who will ease their suffering, or make them happy, when what they actually need is the Physician of Souls who can cure them of what is really making them sick.

To be sure our Lord He wants us to bring all our needs to Him in prayer. But have you noticed that the bulk of our prayers have to do with health issues, or material blessings, jobs, or money? How often do our prayers deal with the growth of the Church or people coming to faith and being saved? How many of our prayers ask the Lord to strengthen our own faith, or bring us to repentance, or give us forgiving hearts? When was the last time you prayed for the Lord to increase your desire to worship Him and study His Word? Even our prayers of thanksgiving often lack any gratitude for the salvation Christ has won for us through His life, death, and resurrection.

Unfortunately, there are preachers who teach their people that God is like a heavenly vending machine just waiting for us to insert our money, and make our selection for how we want Him to bless us. They may even say that God cannot act to bless your life unless you first ask Him to do so. But once you ask Him to act in your life, step back and watch the miracles happen. Not once do these health and wealth preachers mention Jesus Christ or the true reason He came into this world. Not once do they speak about, or offer, Christ's miraculous blessing of forgiveness of sins and salvation of the soul through faith Him. They only preach about worldly gain. Never once do they introduce their hearers to the prayer our Savior gave to His Church.

Did you know that there is only one petition in the Lord's Prayer that deals with physical or worldly needs? The other six petitions are focused on spiritual and eternal matters. The majority of the Lord's Prayer asks God to come to us with His grace to enable us to do His will. We pray in the Lord's Prayer that God would strengthen us to withstand the temptations of Satan, the world, and our own sinful flesh. We ask Him to work His miracle of healing in our lives through the forgiveness of our sins, and that we in turn would forgive others as we ourselves have been forgiven.

Now, I'm not saying that it is wrong to ask the Lord to help us when we, or a friend or loved one, is ill or in need. To be sure, God truly wants us to come to Him in faith with our cares and burdens. We can and should pray for health and protection and even money, but foremost in our prayers should be our praise and thanksgiving for the blessings we have received because Jesus fulfilled the purpose for which He came into the world – to win the forgiveness of our sins and salvation of our souls by giving His life on the cross. That is the greatest miracle that Jesus has ever performed.

Jesus came into the world proclaiming the Good News of God's miraculous healing for sinners, not by works, but by faith in Christ alone. And the medicine of the Good News is still being proclaimed in His Church today. The soothing salve of God's grace and mercy for sinners is also generously applied in the waters of Holy Baptism, where He cleanses you of your sins, and gives life to the soul that lay dead in its sin.

The Great Physician also knows that our faith and our souls must be fed if they are to remain strong and healthy. Therefore, He prepares a meal for us wherein He offers and gives the healing balm of His very body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our faith. He freely dispenses this life-giving medicine to all who believe His Word of promise – “this is My body, this is My blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.”

My friends, as He did for Peter's mother-in-law, so Jesus, Himself, has come to you this day to raise you up from your sickbed of sin. He has come to your aid with His miraculous gift of forgiveness for your sins and salvation of your soul in Holy Absolution and the proclamation of His Word. And He comes to you now in His Holy Supper to strengthen your faith, and cure your sin-sick soul with the healing salve of His very body and blood for you to eat and drink.

Yes, Jesus has come this day, to sin-sick sinners, like you and me, as your Great Physician to cure you of the deadly disease of sin and death.

May the healing medicine of His love and forgiveness for you, His aphiami for you, strengthen and keep you in the one true faith unto life everlasting.

Amen