**Mark 1:29-39 February 7, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Mark chapter 1 here re-reading these words. “And immediately Jesus left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon’s mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I have a question for you this morning. After the inclement weather of the past few days, if we weren’t going to have church services this morning, but instead were just going to upload the bulletin and sermon online, and record a service that could be accessed on our website and facebook page, would we plow the snow from the parking lot? Or perhaps think of this, if you didn’t own a truck, or a shanty, or the proper boots, coat, and winter clothes, if you didn’t even own a fishing pole, would you buy a fishing license? Why would you? What would be the point? If you aren’t going to use it, why even prepare it? Why even have it? I still remember after a snowstorm in Kansas, not that there were that many I will admit, when my wife and I were heading down one of the country roads near our house going the “back way” you could say into town, and as we came up to an intersection where we were turning, I looked forward, where a dirt road is, and couldn’t find it. The snow was so high you wouldn’t have known there even was a road there at all, it was completely the same as the fields around it. The road was pretty rough to begin with, so they didn’t plow it, no one was going to use it, no one lived on it, so they left it alone.

Again, I ask you, if you aren’t going to use it, why even prepare it? If you aren’t going to use it, why even have it? Or in light of our reading this morning as we see the continuation of Jesus’ ministry here in the Gospel of Mark, if Jesus is going to fix it: meaning if Jesus is going to come and take away the problem, whether it be an illness or a demon, or even just a fever, what is the proper response? If you were just going to sit and do nothing, why fix it at all? In our Introit for this morning, the first verse says, “I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.” In our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 40 we hear, “He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.” In our Epistle lesson Paul says in his first letter to Corinth, “For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” And finally, in our Gospel lesson, as we just heard read, Peter’s mother-in-law is incapacitated with a fever, “And He (meaning Jesus) came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, **and she began to serve them.**”

We are the broken ones, the sinful ones, the weak ones, with a host of problems both earthly and spiritually that we wrestle with every day. We struggle with the evidence of sin in our world, we have our own fevers, illness, sicknesses, we wrestle with temptations from demons even though we don’t recognize their influence in our lives. We struggle with inner demons of addiction, sadness, loneliness, depression, especially in these winter months and during the ongoing pandemic which seems to have no end in sight. We are not the healthy ones who come to sit today at the foot of our dear Savior, we are the same as those we hear about in the Gospel of Mark chapter 1, “That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at his door.” This is the place for the sick, the oppressed, the downtrodden, the ones in need not the ones satisfied with themselves. We come here for God to serve us, to restore us, to redeem and uplift us, to remind us of his love and his care and his providing hand. We come to receive from His Word, His Sacraments, his sure promise of peace and restoration when he takes us to be with him, that’s why we come, as the one in need of forgiveness. And we receive it. By the grace of God alone, we receive it, we are blessed and restored, we are forgiven and given life again in his name, we walk in with the baggage of the world on our shoulders and lay it all before God’s altar and His cross and a picture of the life that waits for us in the sight of his glorious resurrection, the largest and most prominent picture that we see here at Trinity Lutheran Church.

Which brings us back to our initial question. If you aren’t going to use it, why fix it? Why have it? God has dealt bountifully with me, which is why I will sing to the Lord. I was weak and God gave me strength, why? To do nothing? Paul was entrusted with the truth of the Gospel, how could he not share it? “For if I do this of my own will” he says, “I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a **stewardship**.” He has it, he knows it, it’s been entrusted to him and a proper stewardship of that gift is to share it. You don’t learn it to just know it, you learn it to share it. And finally in our Gospel lesson, Peter’s mother-in-law isn’t told to serve, once she is able to move again she immediately goes to work to serve those around her, not just because it’s her house, or there is some sort of obligation, but you can imagine it’s out of thanksgiving for the fact that she can get up and do things again.

My dear friends, what is the message here? What does Scripture tell us today? We see in the example of the sick and demon possessed that we are sinners, beggars from God for relief, this is true. We find ourselves restored in His Word which is our great joy when we come here to this place, even in trying times. But if we are restored and do nothing, what does that say about our faith? Our appreciation or recognition of the gift that God has bestowed upon us? Of the healing and restoration that he so freely gives to us? He loves, we love. He gives, we give. As a response, not the initial reaction, not the first instinct of our sinful hearts, this concept of service is only understood through him who already has served us, has shown us the example of service in his ministry and life, it doesn’t come naturally to us, to be honest it’s the opposite. What comes naturally to us is to get, receive, consume, and do nothing. It’s easy to do nothing! Even more so now when so many of the normal ways that we would serve have been cut off due to the pandemic. It’s easy to simply look at plan A as the only way, and when that isn’t available due to other circumstances to simply just sit back and say it’s not going to happen. But God’s love to us takes away the barriers and our response in thanksgiving is to serve others.

In the final verse of hymn 826, “Hark, the Voice of Jesus Crying” we sing, “Let none hear you idly saying, ‘There is nothing I can do,’ while the multitudes are dying, and the Master calls for you.” It reminds me of a lesson I learned when I was first learning to play football in high school, and this story is appropriate as it is of course Super Bowl Sunday. We were in a game and I was lined up on the right side as tight end. The play called for me to run past the defender and block the linebacker. The quarterback hiked the ball, I ran past the defender and couldn’t find the outside linebacker. The person I was supposed to block wasn’t there. The running back ran to the left and at some point came back to the right as he was running and scrambling for yards and I just sort of stood there, looking around, not sure what to do, or who to block. As I came to the sideline my coach wasn’t very happy with me, I explained to him that the guy I was supposed to block wasn’t there, but that’s when he gave me probably the most core message of the entire game of football. “Find someone to hit.” If the person you aren’t assigned to block isn’t there, you actively go and find someone else to block, if the ball is in play you never just stand there doing nothing!

You may feel yourself saying those same words as we find in this hymn in these winter days, in the midst of this pandemic, “There is nothing I can do.” The normal outlets and avenues for reaching out to others may be closed, but the message of God’s Word is clear, we are called to serve. Adam was created in the garden not to sit around eating fruit all day, but to tend to the garden, name the animals, and serve the Lord. We are called to do, to work, to serve, even after retirement as we now get to go out and find new avenues of service to God. Any service is to God’s glory, even if it’s in the benefit of those around us and our community. We are called to serve. Out of thanksgiving for the gift of forgiveness we receive, not to receive a perishable, earthly reward, not to receive recognition as being the best or the greatest, it’s never about that. To God be the glory of our service. But instead of sitting around, doing nothing, “Find someone to serve.” Find an opportunity, recognize the door that God has opened in the life of someone around you and that He is calling you to serve in that capacity to bring this person to the place of peace, to the source of all knowledge to answer any and all questions about life, pain, sickness, suffering, purpose, or any other struggle that they may face, to help this person find a place of healing and restoration so they can receive the same gift of forgiveness that you have. That’s the blessing God gives us in service. That’s what we are called to do, what we get to do. For He has given us so much and healed us of our greatest sickness, sin. So, we serve him gladly in thanksgiving for the life we have in Him. We Pass It On.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.