

B Epiphany 5

8 February 2009

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Ascension Lutheran Church

“Jesus The Healer”

Mark 1.29-39

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

The text I would like you to think about is today’s Gospel story, Mark 1.29-39:

²⁹As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. ³²That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.

This text invites us to think about “**Jesus The Healer**”.

Last week I drove past a church with a sign board out front that read “**GOD ALWAYS WINS**”. That’s not true, is it.

You’re driving on the beltway and someone cuts you off causing you to hit the brakes in order to avoid a collision. How do you react?

The charitable response is to say “they probably didn’t see me, I might have been hiding in their blind spot – no harm no foul”. Or, “I bet something may have momentarily distracted them. Maybe a bee flew in their window, or the sun got in their eyes. It happens!” Or “they might have been experiencing some kind of emergency – we probably all should have gotten out of their way.” Those would have been charitable responses.

The forgiving response would be to say “You know, I’ve done the same thing myself – more than once. It happens. It’s no big deal. I’ll just forgive them and let it go.”

OR

Or we can get all worked up: “Did you see that idiot. Cut me off. I’m going to catch him and give him a dose of his own medicine. I’ll cut him off. Or at least use some sign language to show him what moron he is ***I’ll show him!***”

Which response do you think **God** lobbies for?

The angry response? Or the charitable, forgiving response?

And which response do you think **Satan** lobbies for?

Does God always win?

A plant manager is sitting in his office at the peanut butter factory and the company chemist comes in and says a sample of batch 13 is tainted.

The manager could say, “Quick, destroy batch 13. Check the other batches. Sterilize all the equipment. And hold all shipments until we figure out how big this problem may be.”

OR

“Dump that sample and try another. And keep trying samples until you find a good one. A little salmonella isn’t going to hurt that much peanut butter.”

Which response do you think **God** lobbied for?

And which response do you think **Satan** lobbied for?

Does God always win?

There’s plenty of Biblical examples. There’s the whole group of people we call “martyrs”, those who died because they confessed that Jesus was Lord: “Lions 12, Christians 0”.

Hebrews 11 has a long list of people who died in faith, meaning they went to their death believing there was something better in store for them in Christ. But many of the circumstances of their deaths would hardly be called a win.

In our OT lesson this morning (Job 7.1-7) Job is wrestling with the terrible tragedy that has happened to him. His wealth has been stolen, his children have died, and his health is broken. It leads him to wonder if God even cares, let alone wins.

In Romans 7 St. Paul talks about the battle taking place in his own heart:

I know what **God** wants me to do.

I know what **Satan** is trying to get me to do.

I want to do what is right ... **but God doesn’t always win.**

“Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?”

If God won every one of those struggles that takes place in the human heart, there’d be no evil in the world, would there. No violence, no stealing, no cheating. No betrayals. No abuse. No Wall Street scandals. No wars. No accidents due to negligence.

The reality is that God does not always win!

But God ultimately wins!

That is true. (And maybe that’s what that church sign board meant. ?)

Satan wins many skirmishes, and a lot of the battles. But God will win the war.

There’s no way to look at Jesus dying on the cross and at that moment say that was a win. But from that moment comes the redemption of the whole human race. Because Jesus died on the cross, all who turn to him in faith have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Satan is still hard at work, but Christ has destroyed the ultimate power of Satan.

Sin is still hard at work, but Christ has destroyed the ultimate power of sin.

Death is still a grim reality, but Christ has destroyed the finality of death.

God does not always win – not here, not now – but God will ultimately, finally, and eternally win. Faith is about picking the winning side right now in spite of evidence day in and day out that God does not always win.

For me, healing falls into the same paradigm:

God heals.

All healing comes from God.

But God does not always heal.

God will ultimately heal.

___All healing come from God. Our bodies have an amazing capacity to fight off illness, and when ill, to heal. That capacity was created by God.

Medicines have the power to battle illness. That power comes from God.

Medical practitioners learn more and more about which medicines to use and which procedures are the most therapeutic. That knowledge comes from God. Whether the doctor knows that, believes that, acknowledges that or not, her knowledge comes from God.

All healing comes from God: every one of us would have died long ago from the common cold if God did not work healing in us.

___All healing comes from God, but God does not always heal. We know that from experience, don't we. We have prayed plenty of times for people who's specific illness was not healed. We know God may have other plans for that person, other lessons that need to be taught. St. Paul prayed three times that God would remove his "thorn of flesh". It did not happen. St. Paul was not healed. But he did learn a larger lesson about the sufficiency of God's grace. We acknowledge that God may have other things in mind for the person we are praying for by adding the words "not my will but Your will be done" to our prayers.

There are no 2,000 year old people walking around: some illness has taken them. We all survive many brushes with death, but finally death takes us. There is finally in each of lives a physical illness that God does not heal.

I hear that sad reality of life in today's Gospel story. Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law. That's remarkable and word gets out. The news spreads. St. Mark tells us "That evening, at sundown, the people of Capernaum brought to Jesus all who were sick or possessed with demons. The whole city was gathered around the door. And Jesus cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons."

Now maybe I'm reading too much into that, but I hear exactly what I experience *today* in St. Marks telling of that story. They brought to Jesus everyone who was sick, and everyone who was in bondage to evil, and Jesus healed many ... but not all. Just like we bring to Jesus everyone who is sick and everyone who is in bondage to evil, and see Jesus heal many ... but not always all.

We pray for everyone who is sick and Jesus heals many... but not all. That leads some people to think that God is unfair: he will heal some but not others And it lead some people to think that God is impotent in the face of illness: he can heal some illnesses but not others. And it leads some people to blame the victims: people are not healed because they lack faith, it's their fault their not healed. Or we can short circuit the whole conversation by simply sweeping it under the rug of "God's will" – we can't know what God is up to so why talk about it?

If any of that works for you ... ok. But what works best for me is remembering that perfect healing lies only on other side. Perfect healing. The healing of every illness and birth defect. The healing of my rebellious spirit against God. The healing of our broken world and the fallen human condition. It all lies on the other side of death. Not on this side. Not in this world.

God **ultimately** wins. But the ultimate victory lies beyond Jesus' return and the resurrection of all flesh. Then sin and death and all illness will be swept away.

And if we are going to experience **perfect healing**, then we have to pass on to the other side. We've got to cross over. If God **always** healed ... that wouldn't happen. If God always healed every illness in this world, I'd be stuck here, getting older and frailer and sicker. But not moving on to embrace perfect healing.

My father died last July. We rejoiced. Oh, we really, really loved him. But he was really, really sick and had been for quite a while. Helpless and in pain, it was time for him to move on. He did. And we rejoiced.

So we acknowledge that **all** healing comes from God. And we **pray** for the sick. We not only ask that their pain be eased or that they come to peace of mind about their illness. We pray that they be healed. We want that for our loved ones. We pray for that.

But we also know God's grace will accomplish God's purpose in our lives and the in the lives of the people we pray for. God's purpose may include healing. God may have something else in mind. Prayer is always powerful and effective – it always brings God's grace to touch the life of the person we pray for. But it will accomplish what God wants, not always what we want.

And we also know that for each of us there must be a time that God gathers us to Himself. There has to be. Because the best stuff, the stuff we hope for, lies in Christ *beyond* death. When death takes a loved one, especially when it's an "untimely" death, it's hard to say goodbye. It's extremely painful to let go. It leaves a hole in our hearts and lives. But we have to let go because the really good stuff lies on the other side. Bringing a loved one back may be good for us ... but it might not be so good for that loved one.

In Christ we look beyond death with hope. And know ...

God ultimately heals.

God ultimately wins.