

Epiphany 5B (2/8/09 – Jesus – Epiphanied as Restorer of Health and True Life)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Our *Holy Gospel Lesson* for this ***Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany*** continues right on the heels of our Savior casting out the evil spirit of a man in the Synagogue at Capernaum – which we heard last Sunday. Mark, in typical fashion, doesn't really allow us to stand around gawking – but instead moves us right into the next wondrous work of our Lord: ***And IMMEDIATELY He left the Synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.*** [MK 1.29] And there, just a one-minute walk from the Synagogue – if the traditional location of the Synagogue and Peter's house are accurate – we find Peter's mother-in-law ***ill with a fever*** and lying in bed. No sooner do they arrive than ***IMMEDIATELY they told Jesus about her ... and He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up*** (literally, ***raised her up***) ***and the fever left her*** (many manuscripts add here another ***IMMEDIATELY***); ***and she began to serve them*** [1.30-31].

Immediately ... immediately ... immediately – the word occurs 3 times here ... 41 times in the whole *Gospel*. St. Mark keeps moving us to the ultimate epiphany of our Savior: His glorious and gracious work **for us** and **for the salvation of our souls** – and bodies – on the Cross. But let us step back a moment and take in what is happening here in such quick succession – for it is not yet Holy Week. Today let us ponder our Lord's healing of Peter's mother-in-law. Today let us see ***Jesus – Epiphanied as Restorer of Health and True Life.***

Last Sunday we heard the evil spirit declare Jesus to be ***the Holy One of God*** [MK 1.24] – and afterward everyone marveled at Jesus and His authoritative teaching and healing. Mark could have lingered there a bit – or at least not ***immediately*** rushed us off to the next miracle of our Lord. Even in our own *Gospel Lesson*, the people of Capernaum have not so quickly left what they saw Jesus do before their eyes that Sabbath. Our text says that by ***sundown they brought to Him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door.*** [1.32-33]

But there is something else that our Lord would teach us ... and it is very **important** – perhaps that is why the Holy Spirit inspired Mark to move so quickly to this healing of Peter's mother-in-law. What is so important? It is this epiphany: that Jesus is the merciful yet powerful Lord and Savior of **both** the greatest **and** the least – of **both** those who are greatly troubled by the evil one ... **and** those who simply suffer the daily maladies that have come to this earth because of original sin ... **and also** everyone in between. Or to put it another way: Jesus has come to be ***Restorer of Health and True Life*** for **all** people ... to redeem both the soul and the body of **all** people – and that's the Gospel ... the Good News for all of us

gathered here this day.

That Peter's mother-in-law represents the **least** of us is indicated by her anonymity – she is named in **none** of the Gospels ... nor in the rest of Holy Scripture. In a certain sense she is just as insignificant as the hundreds –perhaps even thousands – of nameless multitudes who were healed by the Savior during His sojourn on earth. She is a commoner ... just like you and me. Jesus is the “celebrity” – no doubt He could go anywhere in the city He wanted to. But He chooses to go to the unnamed mother-in-law of one of His fisherman disciples ... because she is important to Him – **everyone** is ... all of **us** are ... each and every one of you!

The house was no doubt modest ... and the sick bed is certainly no place to entertain guests – it is no place for someone as important as the Messiah ... beneath the likes of One so noble ... *the Holy One of God* ... the Son of God incarnate. **Or is it?** Christ will show us why He has humbled Himself to be born of the Virgin ... why He has stooped down from His throne in heaven. The sick bed is the place for family – He has made Himself our Brother. The sick bed is the place for doctors and nurses – He has come as the Great Physician of both body and soul. The sick bed is for those who attend – Christ the Lord and Master of all has made Himself Servant of all.

There is nothing more important in all the world at that moment ... than for Jesus to be there for that unnamed, sick mother-in-law. With all on Himself – all our sins ... all our sorrows ... all our infirmities ... the whole world – He is there just for her. He takes her by the hand and lifts her up ... raises her up ... resurrects her (as St. Luke puts it in his *Gospel*). And **immediately** the high fever leaves her. As usual, our Lord's healing is complete ... to the very utmost. When He heals the blind, they see. When He heals the lame, they walk and leap – no need for rehab and weeks of physical therapy. And when He heals this fevered mother-in-law – she immediately gets up and goes about her God-given vocation ... as if nothing had happened. She gets up and **immediately** begins to serve them ... Jesus, Peter and Andrew, James and John ... and whoever else was there. Her service to the Lord is her *Thank-You* note.

Now there is something we should learn from this – something revealed about our own worship ... and why we Lutherans prefer to refer to worship as *Divine Service*. Notice that Peter's mother-in-law is **unable** to serve the Lord before He serves her. First Christ gives to her – restores her health and life – and only then is she able to arise and serve Christ. So it is also with us, dear Christians. In the *Divine Service* the Divine One – *the Holy One of God* – first comes and serves us with His forgiveness, life, and salvation ... and only afterward do we serve Him –

worship Him – with our words and our lives ... serving Him and serving neighbor in His Name.

This must be so because we are **all** feverish in a way – feverish with sin. It is a heavy, burning, oppressive weight that would crush us and suffocate us – even us Christians ... if it could. We are all delirious with the fever of our sinful flesh – unable to perceive rightly true reality ... our knowledge is distorted. “I’ve never been sick a day in my life,” some might say. But we are **all** sick with sin – sinful from the moment of our conception and on a downward slide to death ever since ... even if we don’t recognize it in our delirium. It is the curse of our original sin – the curse God foretold when He gave the first man the first command. Our sinful hearts burn with sinful lust for that which is not ours – both people and things. Our sinful thoughts burn with evil wishes for those who cross us. Our sinful tongues burn with unkind ... even hateful ... words against our neighbors – those we are to love as ourselves. Sometimes our sin is so great, that we burn against God – as if **we** were the maker, and He our creature ... as if we ever had the right to question His decisions and His holy, righteous will.

We are **all** feverish with sin – but so often refuse to recognize it ... own up to it ... and fail to seek the only remedy. Like a man with walking pneumonia who refuses to go to the doctor ... like a woman with signs of cancer who refuses to see her physician, we so often continue on in life unmindful of our most serious, congenital defect ... ignoring our sin ... as if it would simply go away. And just as untreated illness can kill ... so also our sin. There is only one remedy ... one cure ... one medicine for what ails us deep down – *Jesus ... the Restorer of Health and True Life.*

Peter’s mother-in-law, with all her crackling aches and pains, was precious in the sight of God ... and she knew it. She knew it because Christ came to her in her weakness and sickness – and healed her that Sabbath day. *The Holy One of God* Who was there as a Servant for Peter’s mother-in-law is among us also this morning, dear saints ... as Servant at His Table ... serving His most holy Body and His precious Blood ... giving them to you – giving **HIMSELF** to you – to eat and to drink ... *for the forgiveness of sins. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a Ransom for many* [MT 20.28].

If Peter’s mother-in-law had known that the *Holy One of God* was coming that day – fever or no – she would have served Him the very best she could provide. Jesus knows of **your** coming to His Holy Table this morning ... and He serves you with the very best **He** can provide. *Jesus ... the Restorer of Health and True Life* gives us His very best – **HIMSELF** –together with His forgiveness ... His redemption of soul and body ... His holiness ... His righteousness ... His eternal life.

For by God's grace – by His gracious work in your lives through His Word and Sacraments to release you from sin, death, and devil and bring you into His eternal heavenly Sabbath-rest – you, too, are precious in His sight ... worth the giving of His Body and Blood. Jesus died for you – *and for many ... for all* – to be your *Restorer of Health and True Life*.

Here, then, is the true “miracle cure” that so many are searching for ... the one and only “stem-cell” that can effectively treat any and every affliction of body **and** soul – *Jesus ... the Restorer of Health and True Life*. He Who has been epiphanied as divine and immortal by nature graciously gives you His *Health and True Life*. Jesus takes you by the hand ... and lifts you up from the feverish sickness of your sinful lives ... raises you up from your good-as-dead existence ... resurrects you in the forgiveness of sins ... and restores you to health ... indeed to true life that is everlasting.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]