

*Luke 4:38 Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. <sup>39</sup>So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.*

*<sup>40</sup>When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. <sup>41</sup>Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ.*

*<sup>42</sup>At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. <sup>43</sup>But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." <sup>44</sup>And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**"I MUST PREACH THE GOOD NEWS... THAT'S WHY I WAS SENT"**

Last week, you and I were up in the hill country of Nazareth with Jesus. Maybe you remember from last week's Gospel reading and sermon. Jesus was a local boy (actually a man of about 30) returning to his home town. Out and about Jesus had made something a name for himself. But back in his home town they weren't impressed. Not only did they *not* put out the welcome mat for him, they actually drove him out of town.

Jesus took their "No" for an answer. He didn't give up on them. He would return a year later. But for now Jesus walked the twenty or so miles down the road to the lake called the Sea of Galilee. It is a beautiful lake, about twelve miles long and six miles wide, nestled among the high hills of Galilee. In the time of Jesus, fishing was abundant and the region was the most densely populated area of Palestine. A city or two and numerous fishing villages dotted its shores. For his divinely measured reasons, Jesus adopted one of those humble fishing villages as his base of operations. It was a village called Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Nazareth's loss was Capernaum's gain.

Apparently, the very Sabbath after being rejected at the Nazareth synagogue, Jesus was teaching in the Capernaum synagogue. He was intent on his mission. A little rejection would not stop him; it wouldn't even delay him. His mission was too important. And there in Capernaum, people listened and watched and began to believe. It was the beginning of something new and beautiful.

If you went to a small school in a small town in the middle of nowhere, you understand the draw of "the new kid" because they were few and far between. Those were my grade school years. Just about every one of the 13 kids I graduated from eighth grade with had

been in school with me from kindergarten. If those were your school days, you remember when a new kid joined your class. There was kind of a competition to be the new kid's friend. Everyone wanted to know: was he good at kickball? Would he outsmart the smartest girl in the class for the best grades?

New relationships can be exciting like that. We imagine all sorts of things. The new person is a blank canvas, and we paint a lot of our hopes and dreams on that canvas. Bit by bit, we find out about them, what they are like and what they are not like, what they have to offer and where they draw the lines, and if we are gracious, we accept them for who they are. That's what it was like for the people of Capernaum when Jesus waltzed into their synagogue one Sabbath Day.

People were amazed at his teaching in the synagogue service, just before our reading. *"His message had authority"* even though he didn't have the gray hair of their rabbis. After the worship service, and this is where we get to our reading, a worshipper named Simon, whom we know as Simon Peter, invited the visiting rabbi to his house. It was a great honor to invite a rabbi for a Sabbath dinner. At Simon's house, they let Jesus know about Simon's mother-in-law. She was seriously sick. Would he say a prayer over her?

Jesus went to her and healed her just like that. So quick and total was her recovery that before the fevered sweat had dried from her brow, she was waiting on the distinguished teacher sitting in her house. Jesus' service to her prompted her thankful service to him.

Word got out; people got excited—but they waited. You see, it was the Sabbath, and the Sabbath was a day of rest. Unless it was a case of life and death, you weren't to be carting around the sick on the Sabbath. But according to Jewish reckoning, the Sabbath day is over at sunset. So, *"when the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness."* It had been a long day for Jesus. Worshiping, teaching, preaching, being a guest in someone else's house. And now at bedtime it was quiet knocks on the door, people hat in hand, "I'm sorry, rabbi, but she's been like this for almost a week now..." Jesus had time for them all. How I love Jesus! None ever came to Jesus needing help and heard him say, "It's my day off." Never did he say, "I'm off the clock. Come back tomorrow."

Now you might say, "Yah, but Jesus was the Son of God. It was easy for him." But remember that other time, when he was sleeping in a boat, in the middle of a storm? Son of God or not, he got exhausted! Remember Jesus' tears at the tomb of his friend Lazarus? Remember Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death?"* As we watch Jesus tirelessly serve others, it won't do for us to lamely say, "But he was the Son of God..." No, it was tough. I don't know if doing miracles physically drained Jesus, but always being attentive to everyone else's needs wears a person down. Yet into the night Jesus stood by the sick beds of all who were brought to him. No one brought a child or parent or spouse and went away disappointed. Jesus helped them all. Can you imagine the words of thanks to Jesus, praise to God!

Finally, well into the night, they stopped, and Jesus closed his weary eyes in sleep.

And then, *"at daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place."* Healing and helping was

important, but Jesus had other things to do. He had to pray. It was so important that he walked out of the house, out of the village, off the beaten paths and found a deserted place to pray. The distance would buy him time and the solitude would allow him to focus. This was not anti-social behavior. To be the servant these people needed, Jesus needed a strong tie to his heavenly Father. In that deserted place Jesus committed his actions and the people to God the Father. He prayed. He cared enough about people to spend serious time and effort in prayer. It was that important.

Finally, people found him. They had been looking for the new guy in town. He was wise. He was powerful. He was concerned and loving. And so they wanted him back. Who would not? Yet while Jesus would often return to Capernaum over the next couple years, he could not stay only with them. ***“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.”***

There is so much to see and to love in this new dawn of Jesus’ ministry. It has all the freshness and sincerity of first love, all the potential of a story in its first chapter. Jesus, so good and powerful; so concerned and loving. Jesus presents a full-orbed ministry. We know that he has come into this world to establish peace between God and us. That’s what the prophets dreamed. That’s what the angels sang. But Jesus is concerned about our everything—our eternal well-being, and our here and now. We know which is the more important. Jesus told us which is more important. He didn’t say, “I need to heal people in other villages.” He said, ***“I must preach the good news... to other towns... that is why I have come.”*** It’s the preaching that was most important; the message, the knowledge, the faith.

And yet Jesus couldn’t just preach. To have only preached would have said that Jesus only cared about half of us, our soul and not our body. But in the beginning God created us body and soul, and Christ came as our Savior in body and soul, and he will raise us for eternity body and soul. Jesus proved his total commitment and concern by saving us for eternity – that was the core of his mission – and also as he paid serious attention to human sickness and suffering while in this world.

The Apostle John accompanied Jesus on much of his ministry. John watched and learned from Jesus’ whole-person ministry. First John 3:17 declares it a model for our own Christian lives, and the life of the Christian congregation: *“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?”* It is right for us to give generously, not only to God’s gospel work, but to help people even while in this world.

It is right that we have a food pantry, and that we help distribute food boxes for area seniors. We do well to look for opportunities to help those in sickness and sorrow. So it is right for our church body on a wider scale to support the Central Africa Medical Mission in Zambia and Malawi. There, we help to meet the health needs of tens of thousands of patients every year. So it is that we have Lutheran high schools not only for future pastors and teachers, but also 27 area Lutheran high schools for general education.

It is right for us to beat back the sinful nature which would always save up for our own comfort, for one more toy, one more convenience, for just a bit more in retirement. Jesus

himself taught us to trust our heavenly Father and to beat our selfish natures into submission. He taught us to pray not for blessings without measure, but “*Give us our daily bread.*”

We realize that for Jesus’ saving love to gain a hearing in the world around us, we need to be known as people who really care about people, soul and body. Concern for the body gives credibility to our concern for their soul.

And that is what matters. It matters for others and it matters for us. And so Jesus went to other towns, healing yes, but that was not the most important reason. No. We return to Jesus’ own words, “***I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.***” The most important thing Jesus could give was not health, not miracle cures for malaria or leprosy or even raising people from death. The most important thing he could give was to tell people what he had come to earth to do: to give his life as a ransom for all of us and all our sins.

It is a message that needs to be proclaimed every week from every Christian pulpit. And not just on Sundays and from pulpits, but every day of the week in the conversations of ordinary Christians.

The good news of the kingdom of God needs to be proclaimed because of two things: first, because contrary to all honest appraisals of ourselves and our motives, we naturally deny how badly we need Jesus, we deny how far we fall short of God’s standard of perfection. At those times we need to be told, again and again, that we need Jesus even when we don’t think we do. Without him, we are lost, forever!

And there is a second reason that the good news of the kingdom of God must be proclaimed. When we are not arrogantly thinking better of ourselves than we ought, a more honest tally of life will lead us to realize that there is no hope in ourselves. That more honest tally looks at the selfish motives of our hearts, all the obligations we have let slide over the years and the ruin that has come because of us, of all the people we have dismissed and begrudged, we are driven to despair of ourselves. At that point we need to hear, to call to mind, the one who came to save us. Even as he was healing broken bodies, he was multi-tasking another work in the background at all times: Jesus was fulfilling the law in our place. He kept it for me! He did it all. And his perfect obedience culminated in his willing death on a cross for the punishment of sins—for mine and yours!

Dear Jesus, give us ears to hear your love for us, minds to realize your rich and daily blessings of body and soul, hands to serve you and others, voices to praise. Give us hearts like those humble people of Capernaum, hearts that long for your presence in every moment of our lives. Amen.