



St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Wilton, WI
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
February 7, 2021
**Inviting People to
Journey with Christ's Family
in Spreading God's Love and Mercy**

In Isaiah the one God who sits above the earth and numbers the stars also strengthens the powerless. So in Jesus' healing work we see the hand of the creator God, lifting up the sick woman to health and service (diakonia). Like Simon's mother-in-law, we are lifted up and healed to serve. Following Jesus, we strengthen the powerless; like Jesus, we seek to renew our own strength in quiet times of prayer.

Arise, Your Light Has Come!



1 A - rise, your light has come! The Spir - it's call o - bey;
2 A - rise, your light has come! Fling wide the pris - on door;
3 A - rise, your light has come! All you in sor - row born,
4 A - rise, your light has come! The moun - tains burst in song!



show forth the glo - ry of your God which shines on you to - day.
pro - claim the cap - tive's lib - er - ty, good tid - ings to the poor.
bind up the bro - ken - heart-ed ones and com - fort those who mourn.
Rise up like ea - gles on the wing, God's pow'r will make us strong.

Text: Ruth Duck, b. 1947
Music: FESTAL SONG, William H. Walter, 1825-1893
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PRAYER OF THE DAY

Everlasting God, you give strength to the weak and power to the faint. Make us agents of your healing and wholeness, that your good news may be made known to the ends of your creation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING

The Judeans in exile have a good reason to be hopeful: the one who will bring them to freedom is the God who created the world, the God who subdues the rulers of the earth and gives strength to those who are weary.

Isaiah 40:21-31

- ²¹Have you not known? Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
- ²²It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to live in;
- ²³who brings princes to naught,
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.
- ²⁴Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,
when he blows upon them, and they wither,
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.
- ²⁵To whom then will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.
- ²⁶Lift up your eyes on high and see:
Who created these?
He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;
because he is great in strength,
mighty in power,
not one is missing.
- ²⁷Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
“My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?
- ²⁸Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
- ²⁹He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
- ³⁰Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
- ³¹but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

Psalm 147:1-11, 20c

- ¹Hallelujah! How good it is to sing praises to our God!
How pleasant it is to honor God with praise!

²The LORD rebuilds Jerusalem,
and gathers the exiles of Israel.
³The LORD heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.
⁴The LORD counts the number of the stars
and calls them all by their names.
⁵Great is our LORD and mighty in power;
there is no limit to God's wisdom.
⁶The LORD lifts up the lowly,
but casts the wicked to the ground.
⁷Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;
make music upon the harp to our God,
⁸who covers the heavens with clouds
and prepares rain for the earth,
making grass to grow upon the mountains.
⁹God provides food for the cattle
and for the young ravens when they cry.
¹⁰God is not impressed by the might of a horse,
and has no pleasure in the speed of a runner,
¹¹but finds pleasure in those who fear the LORD,
in those who await God's steadfast love. ^{20c}Hallelujah!

SECOND READING

God entrusted Paul with the responsibility of bringing the gospel to diverse people. Hence the focus of Paul's ministry is not his own rights or privileges as an apostle but the privilege of serving God by freely sharing the good news of Christ with others.

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

¹⁶If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! ¹⁷For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. ¹⁸What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

¹⁹For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. ²⁰To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. ²¹To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. ²²To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. ²³I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

HOLY GOSPEL

Everywhere Jesus goes, many people expect him to set them free from oppression. Everywhere he goes, he heals people and sets them free. Disease, devils, and death are running for their lives. The forces that diminish human life are rendered powerless by Jesus.

Mark 1:29-39

²⁹As soon as [Jesus and the disciples] 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 sunset, 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; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

³⁵In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." ³⁸He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." ³⁹And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

SERMON

One summer during my seminary years, I was serving a church in a small Midwestern town. There was a Senior Center in the community, and each weekday morning, people gathered there. One of the women from the church (whom we shall call) Marilyn, told me about it, and although I wasn't a "senior," she invited me to come.

When I arrived for my first visit, Marilyn offered me coffee or tea, bakery, fruit, and any number of good things to eat! She greeted everyone as they came in, encouraged them to take a seat, introduced us (if we did not know each other), got them something to drink, offered them food she had purchased and/or prepared, and encouraged discussion on a variety of topics.

Some of the people who attended were from the church I was serving, but there were also non-Lutherans and non-church goers there, too. Not only did these morning gatherings give the seniors in the community a place to go for breakfast, but they also provided them with a reason to get out of their homes to socialize with others and talk about things that were important to them. Going to the Senior Center allowed me to see first-hand how Marilyn expressed her gift of hospitality. She enjoyed making people feel welcome; giving them sustenance, encouragement, and companionship, as she demonstrated her love for them by using her spiritual gift.

At one point during the summer, Marilyn had a physical ailment that was causing her some pain. While one might think that this would be a reason for her to stop volunteering, it was instead encouragement for her to get better! She really enjoyed offering hospitality to the people at the Senior Center. As with Simon's mother-in-law in our pericope today, Marilyn was grateful when she was healed and able to return to her service (diakonia) to God and humankind.

Our gospel passage for today begins with Simon, Andrew, James, and John, bringing Jesus to Simon and Andrew's house. Simon's mother-in-law is there. She has a fever and is abed. The disciples bring Jesus to heal her.

We recall that in ancient times, illness, including a fever, could easily mean death. There were no antibiotics or medicines; there were no pills or vaccines. Her fever has caused her to be unable to do the things that she would normally do when guests arrive--to welcome them, offer them a place to sit and relax, give them something to drink and make them something to eat. But, Jesus takes her by the hand and lifts her up. Jesus

heals her. Her fever leaves, and she begins to serve them.

Perhaps as you read this story, you too are surprised at how quickly Simon's mother-in-law moves from lying in bed sick with fever to serving Jesus and his disciples. Yes, it was customary for women at the time to provide hospitality. A woman's role was to care for the needs of others. A woman's role was not to focus on herself and her own needs, but to focus on the needs of her family and guests. But there was more to her service.

What is of greater importance in this pericope than a woman's gender role, is that Simon's mother-in-law was healed, immediately. She was healed to the extent that she was able to get up and do the things she would normally do! She was able to thank Jesus and his disciples through her hospitality. She was able to thank her son-in-law, and his brother for bringing Jesus to their house. We realize that her response in quickly serving Jesus and his disciples is less about gender roles and expectations. Rather, it is about her love for family and neighbor, and using her spiritual gift!

This pericope is about Jesus' ministry of healing. It begins with Simon's mother-in-law and extends to others in the community who come to her home to be healed by Jesus that evening. Her home becomes a place where Jesus' ministry grows. It begins with Jesus' healing one person (Simon's mother-in-law), then all who need healing in that community (no matter who they were or what their ailment), then spreading to Galilee and other communities as Jesus and the disciples continue God's work in the world. Jesus' ministry begins in what may seem to be a small way, but it grows greater and greater.

In the Gospel of Mark, we see the changes that take place in Jesus' ministry. They are unique and varied. We move from Jesus' proclamation about the good news, to Jesus sharing the good news with others. We move from Jesus' baptism, to the proclamation that Jesus is the beloved Son [of God]. We move from Jesus' solitary ministry, to Jesus inviting four fishermen to be his disciples. We move from Jesus' teaching in a synagogue, to his performing an exorcism. We move from Jesus healing one person, to Jesus healing many persons. We move from Jesus praying alone, to Jesus going out with his disciples to serve others. We move from Jesus' ministry in Capernaum, to his ministry in Galilee, to his ministry in other communities. We move from proclamation to baptism, to calling the disciples, to exorcism, to healing all kinds of infirmities, to Jesus' ministries that help more and more people.

Through these examples, we recognize and proclaim--this is the work of Jesus, the Messiah. This is what Jesus' ministry is about. This is Jesus, fully human and fully divine, who came to earth to heal the sick, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim release of the captives, support the weak, and encourage all to repent and hear the good news! This is Jesus, who died for the sake of all humanity and rose again, so that all who believe in him might have new life. In these stories during the time after Epiphany in the Gospel of Mark, we hear about Jesus and the beginnings of his earthly ministry, we hear about people who are changed due to his coming, and we hear God's word and recognize God's power to impact people then and now.

What does Jesus' ministry mean for us? We too can be healed and lifted up by Jesus' word. Whether we

are suffering in body, mind, or spirit, Jesus' power in his word lifts us up! Jesus' power through prayer lifts us up! Jesus' power lifts us up! Our strength comes from God, who provides emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual sustenance for us. When we pray to God and ask for help in dealing with life's challenges, we too can be restored, rejuvenated, lifted up! And when we are lifted up and strengthened by God, we too can go out to serve God. We can share ourselves and our God-given gifts with others who are in need of lifting up. We can share God's love, grace, and peace with those who may or may not have heard of God. We can promote equity, equality, justice and peace in the world. No matter what our abilities may be, no matter what our challenges may be, we can pray to God and God can lift us up so that we can serve God and humanity in God's name.

Like Marilyn, like Simon's mother-in-law, like many faithful servants we have known in our own lives, God works in and through us. When we hear God's word and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, we too can be healed, lifted up, prepared, and strengthened to do God's work in the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Guided by Christ made known to the nations, let us offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all people in need.

For the church: for ministries of healing and wholeness, for hospital, hospice, and military chaplains, for those serving in prison ministry, for all who proclaim freedom and release in the name of Christ, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For creation: for insects in the grass, clouds on the mountaintops, for cattle and the rainwater they drink, for animals in the snow, that they will find food, for the humility to take our place among all creatures of the earth, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For the nations: for all who lead in cities, towns, and villages, for community organizers, school officials, and CEOs; for international health organizations, that in times of trial, fear, or hopelessness, they find freedom in service to those most in need, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For all wearied by life's burdens: for those who are poor, for those lacking supportive relationships, for those crushed by debt, for those struggling with chronic pain or other sickness, for those exhausted from overwork or stress, and for all who cry out to you especially Katie, Judy, Darlene, Paul, Pam, Alrita, Frank, Jeff, Tessa, Lisa, Bud, Gary, Jim, Jerry, Patty, Harvey, and those we name aloud and in our hearts, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For this congregation: for outreach and social ministries centered here, especially visitors, for ministries of companionship and support, for the young people in this place who open us to new understandings, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

In thanksgiving for the faithful departed, who were called by name and now rest from their labors, that their lives serve as witnesses to the goodness of God, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

Merciful God, hear the prayers of your people, spoken or silent, for the sake of the one who dwells among us, your Son, Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness



- 1 Praise the One who breaks the dark-ness with a lib - er - at - ing light;
- 2 Praise the One who blessed the chil - dren with a strong yet gen - tle word;
- 3 Praise the one true love in - car - nate: Christ, who suf - fered in our place;



praise the One who frees the pris - 'ners, turn - ing blind - ness in - to sight.
praise the One who drove out de - mons with a pierc - ing, two - edged sword.
Je - sus died and rose for man - y that we may know God by grace.



Praise the One who preached the gos - pel, heal - ing ev - 'ry dread dis - ease,
Praise the One who brings cool wa - ter to the des - ert's burn - ing sand;
Let us sing for joy and glad - ness, see - ing what our God has done.



calm - ing storms and feed - ing thou - sands with the ver - y bread of peace.
from this well comes liv - ing wa - ter quench - ing thirst in ev - 'ry land.
Praise the one re - deem - ing glo - ry; praise the One who makes us one.

Text: Rusty Edwards, b. 1955

Music: NETTLETON, J. Wyeth, *Repository of Sacred Music*, Part II, 1813

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The weather forecast for the next few days is for blowing and drifting snow along with cold temperatures. In an attempt to think of something cheerful to pass along to you given this forecast, I began thinking about the beautiful weather that we had earlier this week. We had sunny skies most days and seasonally comfortable temperatures, too.

In addition to enjoying the nice weather these past few days, I enjoyed watching animals. Now, I'm not talking about watching them on television. For example, Punxsutawney Phil looking for his shadow on Groundhog Day, or the dogs and leopard choosing which team will win the Super Bowl. Rather, I am referring to watching animals in nature and looking at the tracks that they leave behind in the snow.

I kept noticing animal tracks as I looked out my window, when I was out walking and while I was driving. There were deer hoof prints and rabbit footprints. There were cat paw prints outside the parsonage (most likely from the cat that likes to roam around the neighborhood). On my way to Cashton, I saw the flock of wild turkeys, and the tracks surrounding them. Looking at a golf course, I noticed that some animals had been playing in the sand traps! The area where the sand trap is located, was covered with prints, but I was too far away to determine which animals had been frolicking there. Perhaps they, like us in our younger years, were enjoying playing in there sandbox!

After this cold weekend, when the temperatures become more comfortable, I hope that you will go outside for a walk, look for animals and if you wish, follow their tracks. If walking is too difficult, then take a ride and look for signs of wildlife. The Wisconsin DNR has information on their website about distinguishing animal hoof/paw/foot/claw prints. They also suggest some tracking guides--*A Field Guide to Animal Tracking in North America*, by James Halfpenny; *A Field Guide to Animal Tracks*, by Olaus Murie; and *Mammal Tracks*, by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. You can stop by your local library to check-out books and guides, too.

As we begin the month of February, now is a good time to experience nature in new ways. Taking a walk, or going for a drive, while looking for animals and/or their tracks, reminds us of God's creation and the beautiful animals that God has created.

Peace,

Pastor Cathy