

# St. Matthew's Church

## NEW YORK CITY

### **THE HEART OF THE HEALER**

**Mark 1:29-39**

**Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, February 8, 2009**

In the text from last Sunday Jesus stands up in the Synagogue and spoke with unparalleled authority; “You have heard it said, but I say to you.” And then we heard the voice of a demon challenging Jesus. In response to the demon, Jesus simply said, “Be silent, and come out” and the demon left the man. The dear man was left hale and in his right mind. I would like to approach the Gospel Lesson for today from Mark by attending the Sabbath Day preaching of Jesus that we might look into “The heart of the Healer.”

**Peter’s Mother-In-Law:** Jesus and the four fishers of men were rejoicing as they left the synagogue for their customary Sabbath meal. “As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her.” Instead of a delicious, hot Sabbath feast, they found a sick cook. Peter probably had no idea she was ill when he invited the Master and his friends over. But there she was, sick with a fever. A fever had incapacitated and made her very ill. She was too sick to do anything. “So (Jesus) went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them” (Mark 1:31). Let us look at the manner in which Jesus healed her. Luke says in the parallel account that He stood over her and rebuked the fever (Luke 4:39). Matthew 8:15 says He touched her. Here in Mark we read that He took her by the hand. Thus, we have a composite picture of Christ standing close to her bed, taking her by the hand, rebuking the fever, and gently raising her up before Peter and his wide-eyed friends.

**A. Jesus Extending His Hand:** Jesus could have healed her any way He pleased, but when He extended His hand in was simply an expression of His genuine love and desire to tenderly meet the woman’s need. It was

condensation of the very principle of the Incarnation.” Jesus’ touch tells us volumes about what He is like and how much He loves us. To touch us in healing and in love, that is His instinctive way, the way of His healing heart. This is what He wants to do with each soul, both those who do not know Jesus and those who do, all who need a touch of grace. What a balm this ought to be to our hearts.

**B. It Was A Great Meal:** That must have been a great meal! It was great because she did her best with what ever she had. But it was also great because of the way it was served. Most of all, it was great because of the excitement. “Come here, my daughter, and you, my son-in-law. Feel my forehead. You too, James and John. I was on fire, burning up, and I became well. I’ve never felt better! The Lord is to be praised!” The shouts and laughter could be heard all around the Sabbath-quieted streets of Capernaum, and continued to sunset.

**Jesus Healing After Sunset:** *“That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door.”* The people hurried in to see Jesus, the sick and the possessed, the diseased and the crippled. Jesus healed every illness and commanded the departure of every demon. What a wonderful night! The demons fled from His presence, and the bed-ridden were tossing their mattresses and crutches into the air. The onlookers were in a state of frenzied joy.

Mark seems intent on impressing us with the way in which Jesus responded to human hurts. As you read through the Gospel of Mark, you cannot help but marvel at the number of stories devoted to Jesus’ healings. Nearly one half of the verses in the Gospel of Mark relate to Jesus’ healing ministry. The message is clear: Jesus relieves the whole range of human ailments. None was excluded. Without regard to who they we are. Jesus brings health and healing. Mark wanted us to know that God wants us well. In Christ we are told how God aches to free us from the prison of our ailments, what ever they may be. God will not rest as long as there is one suffering human creature. God will use every means possible to reach the ailing with a gift of healing. The reigning presence of the Lord God means that all ailments are cured, illnesses healed, deformities reconstructed.

**A.** Marvelous as it was, we should not be naïve about what was going on: most of the people who came simply wanted something from Jesus. There is a reasonable sense in which we cannot blame them. Anyone

who has an ongoing disability can certainly sympathize with them. At the same time, they tragically foreshadowed millions of people across the centuries who have only wanted Christ for what they hoped to receive from Him. Jesus addressed those with this motive after He fed the 5,000, saying; “I tell you the truth, you are looking for Me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill” (John 6:26). They cared little about the spiritual implications of Jesus’ miracles and teaching, but much about the material and temporal. That is the way it was in Capernaum. How nice it would be to have a Jesus to heal us when we have a fever, to make us wealthy, and to give us prestige. Unfortunately, for every prayer that goes up in prosperity, 10,000 go up in adversity. It is natural to want a magic Jesus. But we must always remember that God is not someone to be used. He is to be loved, worshiped, and served regardless of what comes in this world.

**B.** Jesus was being used by man, but it is against this reality that we see His heart, for He genuinely cared about the physical plight of the people whatever their motivations. He hoped to direct some to spiritual reality through His touch. So He lovingly and gently healed them. Not only do we see this, but we also observe that the Savior’s halting heart was tireless in its ministrations. Capernaum was exalted to heaven that day, for deeds worthy of Heaven had been done in her. Children and unlearned parents would recount the deeds of this Sabbath with great detail in the years to come.

**Morning Prayer:** The story does not stop there, because that wonderful evening was followed by an equally wonderful Sunday morning; “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed.” What did Jesus pray? To be sure, this was not exactly the same as we pray. So often many of us structure our prayer time with Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. But not Jesus! There was never any confession, ever! But we can be sure there were plenty of adoration, thanksgiving, and petition. No doubt, Jesus prayed for Himself. What lay before Him was the greatest challenge ever conceived. He also prayed for his disciples one by one. Remember what He said to Peter? “Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you.” Before the Devil ever made his move, Christ had already prayed for Peter. And then, as the context tells us, Jesus prayed for the sinners around Him. He saw what was in Capernaum, and He knew what He would encounter in coming days. So He prayed accordingly.

Above all there was the joy of exchange of soul between Him and the Father.

- A. Jesus exposed His humanity to God, even though He needed no more of the fullness of God (Colossians 2:8-9), being already the exact representation of His nature (Hebrews 1:3). He was wonderfully refreshed as His light was exposed to the Father's light. His purity to the Father's purity and holiness, His life to the Father's Life.
- B. There was also a human reason for Jesus' prayers, for we must remember that though Jesus was God, He did not live His life as God apart from the Father, but rather as a man in dependence upon God. He said, "The Son can do nothing by Himself." And "The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing His work." Jesus depended upon the Father for His power! One of the reasons Jesus did this was because He wants us to live our lives on the same basis. If Jesus prayed in order to live a godly life full of power, so must we. This is an overpowering argument. Jesus is the eternal God Incarnate, the Creator of all, who holds everything together by His power (Colossians 1:16). Yet, He still lived by and in prayer. Prayer is the great necessity of our spiritual lives. We need to pray daily. We need to find times to get away alone. We need to get up early if necessary. Few of us are called to spend many hours in daily prayer, but all of us must spend some time.

The healing heart of Jesus was not as interested in physical healing as in spiritual healing. He refused to let His disciples or the people own Him as their healer in Capernaum, but went out in the country preaching, the gospel of belief and repentance. **Jesus did heal people and still heals today.** I have seen people healed in the church ministry of laying-of-hands and the anointing with oil Sunday after Sunday. God Heals! But physical healings are temporal at best. What Jesus emphasized was the healing of the spirit of man in salvation and then healing from bitterness, hatred, lust, anger, gossip, and the like. Ultimately, the healing of the human spirit is eternal! This is where Jesus' heart was.

If you do not know the reality of the healing heart of Jesus, you can know it. Christ wants to bring His healing touch to your life.

PRAYER: Fill us with love, O God, that we may become instruments of your divine healing grace. Show us the particular ways in which this love is

to be given. Reveal to us those people in our lives whose needs we may meet by the exercise of that love which you awaken within us. Energize us, we pray, in doing those acts of love which can make this world a better place for the people in our lives. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.