

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY
ST. CHRISTOPHER'S
FEBRUARY 8, 2015

As Fr. Walt told us last Sunday, the early days of the young evangelist's ministry were off to a great start.

Wherever he went, crowds gathered, getting bigger and bigger.

People pushed and shoved just to touch him.

Invitations to visit and preach were coming in from all over, not only from his home territory. Some from the Big Time.

He was becoming so talked about that he did not even need any PR, which was a good thing since money was tight.

The road-crew members he had recruited recently were feeling pretty good about their decision to sign on with him.

If things kept on as they were going, he would soon be the most famous rabbi in the country, and they would share his spotlight.

So it was troubling to them that next morning when he disappeared from Simon's house after one of his biggest successes the night before. Vanished instead of building his support base and maybe letting them take up a collection to finance his ministry and cover their expenses.

The town – Capernaum - was small, so he could not have gone far, they reasoned.

They split up and agreed to meet back in an hour.

It did not take long for Simon, the “head roady,” to find him, just as the sun was getting high enough to dispel the evening chill.

There he was, alone, his arms raised and his eyes closed, obviously praying again, and so Jesus was a bit startled when Simon interrupted the silence.

“Come on back to town, man. Everybody's looking for you.

The crowd is already bigger than it was yesterday.

Even some of the fat cats have turned out.”

Jesus sighed, smiled at his new friend and shook his head.

“No, Simon. Bring the rest of the crew out here to me.

Time for us to hit the road.”

“But ...” Simon began to object.

“Many of those people are coming to be healed,” Jesus continued,” and I wish I could help them all,

But after a while all the healings and exorcisms and what they consider “miracles” get in the way of the message – the Good News – the Gospel.

And that's our main job, Simon.

Proclaiming the Good News of God's love for them, and their need to repent so that they can receive it.

All the other stuff is mainly to affirm my preaching and teaching.

To prove my authority.

To get their attention.”

“Sure,” Simon began again, “but ...”

“No ‘buts’ about it,” Jesus interrupted, “my message of repentance and salvation is what’s most important,

and it is so easy for the people – and for us - to get sidetracked.

The Kingdom of Heaven is breaking through, Simon.

Can’t you see it? Can’t you feel it?

It is breaking into their lives, breaking into yours.

In the healings and in the preaching.

Especially in the proclamation.

So all the people need to be taught to look for it and to recognize it and to enter into it.

It is our job to help them understand about God’s Kingdom,

and to learn what they need to do to be part of it and why they should want it.

That’s the most important thing in the world, more important even than having your sight restored, or your leprosy cured.”

Jesus paused for breath.

“So now do you understand why we need to move on, and maybe go a little easier on the razzle-dazzle?”

“Man, oh man,” Simon said, shaking his shaggy head.

“You sure got a lot to learn about this evangelism business!”

And Simon, later named Peter, of course was right.

They all had a lot to learn.

And so do we. We all have a lot to learn.

It is still so easy for us to get sidetracked, and forget that the Kingdom HAS broken through, is breaking into our world and into our lives.

Easy to forget that the healings – physical and spiritual –

these healings we take for granted these days are still signs of that Kingdom,

and that the primary reason for them is to affirm Jesus’ love for us

and his power and authority over us –

and over the demons that try to enslave us, and too often do.

It is so easy for us to forget that our continuing wholeness of spirit – and, if we are very fortunate - wholeness of body,

are both to enable us to rise up and serve our Lord.

Like the story we just heard this morning – Jesus curing Mary Sue’s fever, so that she could take up her rightful place in her son-in-law Simon’s household, and share her gift of hospitality with his visiting friends.

(I know that Mark doesn’t give us her name, but I knew some of her relatives in Demopolis. Nice people, but still kind of a sickly bunch.)

See what I mean about getting sidetracked!

The point is that Mary Sue was restored to health for her own sake, certainly - AND in order for her to carry out her ministry!

And that was what she did.

All the people who were healed by Jesus,

all who were freed from the demons that Jesus cast out of them –
 now they too could return to a faithful life of service – could share their gifts in service to
 the one who healed them – if they understood.

If they knew that what they had experienced and felt was the Kingdom in and around
 them – if they chose to respond to the power and love of God.

Some did and some did not.

Some do and some do not.

Once healed everyone can enter into that new life of joy and promise.

The new life which God's prophets always promised.

That is the power of wholeness and health that Isaiah is promising when he writes,

“Those who wait for the Lord (that is, those who are faithful and awake)

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.”

That is the message of Gospel good news that Paul is writing to the Corinthians about.

The message that he would do anything – absolutely anything within his power, Paul says,
 to have them understand this Gospel – to have us understand it.

That same message is the Good News that we share today.

Jesus frees us from all the bonds that enslave us.

He restores our strength, and we mount up on eagle's wings.

He renews and transforms our lives.

He calls us in turn to serve him and one another in his Father's Kingdom, here and now.

Here and now.

The teaching and preaching - the proclamation of that Gospel is what he came to do, Jesus
 says,

And the healings are both the sign of the authority and the actuality of the grace that
 allows us to see and to respond.

Have you been touched by that power - by the grace of Christ?

Have you been healed by his power and freed to a new life of joyful service?

Have you claimed your ministry – your unique call to serve?

Have I? Has St. Christopher's?

Have we seen, experienced, entered into the Kingdom life?

That is – are we answering God's call, doing God's will by loving him and our neighbor and
 ourselves?

Once that happens for all of us all of the time, when that happens,

then the Kingdom comes in its fullness and Christ will be King over all.

But since in our human sinfulness we cannot even begin to do this by our own power and
 will,

God gives us Christ's power and grace to begin and to continue,

when we make his Son the King of our lives.

And it is then that we are healed and our spiritual lives are made whole, and we share in his mission to proclaim the Good News by our words and by our deeds.

When we live the transformed life that Jesus offers us – and gives us the grace to receive.

When we receive our eagle wings and fly.

The miracles of Jesus did not and do not solve all the problems on earth, or in Palestine, or even in the lives of those who were and are healed.

That is not Jesus' intention.

Rather, they are signs of how his Father's world was created to be,

How we are created to be.

Should be.

Want to be.

One day will be.

That is the promise.

Healings are both a reminder of the bliss of a pre-fallen world - an Eden – a paradise -

And a promise and preview of the future that can be ours – restored people in a restored creation.

In Eden – In a paradise.

Hear and see and believe the Good News that Jesus proclaims.

The Good News that Jesus IS.

Let us hear it, and believe it, and claim it, and work toward it – today.

This day and every day.

I tell you that the Kingdom of God has come near us today.

The Kingdom has come near -

By the love of God,

And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

And the power of the Holy Spirit.