

Epiphany 5, 2021, February 7, **Sermon** (Mk 1:29-39; Ps 147:1-11, 20c; Is 40:21-31)

The holy gospel according to Mark, the first chapter (1:29-30):

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 immediately told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand, and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

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. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. This is the gospel of our Lord.

Greetings, Friends! I am Judith. Though I'm never named in the Christian scriptures (your *New Testament*), I am mentioned. I am the mother-in-law of Simon Peter, the first man called to follow our Lord Jesus. We lived in the lakeside village of Capernaum. In fact, if you visit that place you can still see the bare bones of our house!

I was very fortunate—you could well say *blessed!*—that Jesus visited us that day. You see, I was ill, with a fever so high I couldn't even rise from my bed. When they arrived, Jesus and my sons, and their friends James and John, I was unable to greet them. I couldn't give them water to wash their feet, or invite them to recline in comfort while they dined. Indeed, there wasn't even anything for them to dine on! I say this to my shame, because that is, after all, the responsibility of the woman in the house.

What Jesus did was truly a miracle! He came to me and took my hand. I was so fevered I didn't even realize what was happening. Then all of a sudden my vision cleared and I looked into his eyes—they were *smiling*, almost playful, and as he drew me up all my fatigue and aching melted away!

I came to my feet and wanted to kneel before him, but he backed away and gently said, “Come, follow me.” Those were the same words with which he called my sons! Perhaps he has even called *you* that way??

I learned that Jesus had just begun his ministry of teaching and preaching, healing the sick and casting out demons. He called my sons, and the other disciples who followed him, so he could teach them to continue his work after his death. —I’ve often wondered if he knew then, so early in his ministry, that he would die in just three years.

He certainly knew he didn’t have the favor of the Pharisees or the elders! In fact, just a few weeks after he left our home, word came to us that he’d healed a man with a withered hand—in the synagogue, and *on the sabbath*! It sounded like what he had done for me: he told the man to stretch out his hand, and at that very moment, his hand was completely restored! But instead of celebrating the healing, the Pharisees immediately went out and began to plot with those who were close to King Herod: they wanted to kill Jesus! (Mark 3:1-6).

That made me realize that I, too, had been healed on the sabbath. The men had just come from the synagogue, where there was a man who had an evil spirit. Jesus drove that spirit out, to the amazement of all the people there, and from then on, news about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

After Jesus healed me that day, I couldn’t wait to serve all the men in our home, especially Jesus! I was finally able to provide water for their feet—I wanted to wash *his* feet, but he thanked me courteously and said no. I set out wine for all of them and put out the sabbath meal that had been made ready the previous day. Did you know that any kind of *work* is forbidden on the sabbath? Everything to eat and drink must be prepared the day before. The candles are set out so we have only to light them, and the meal is ready to set on the table.

The men lingered that evening until the sun had set; that was the end of the sabbath, when three stars were visible in the night sky. And then they came, the whole town, bringing to our door all the sick and demon-possessed. Jesus healed various diseases and drove out many demons. I was fascinated by this. The demons spoke to him, sometimes calling him by name: “Jesus of Nazareth” or “the Holy One of God.” But Jesus always tried to hush them up!

I didn't understand this. I thought he'd be *glad* that someone recognized who he was! But when I asked him late that night, he told me he didn't want to be recognized as God's Messiah. At least not yet. He said the healings and miracles he was performing weren't the main work God sent him to do.

I wondered about that for a long time. If Jesus wasn't supposed to be a healer or a miracle worker, what more could God expect of him? Many people I knew were waiting for Messiah to come and set them free from Roman oppression. To show the world that Israel was still God's chosen people. Their Messiah would come charging into Jerusalem on a horse and set things to right for us Jews.

I didn't understand God's truth until after he died on the cross.

My son Simon—Peter—explained it to me. Jesus was a *servant* Messiah, not a conqueror. He died in weakness, vulnerable as God should never be, but that was exactly what God required of him. His true work as God's Messiah was to show that what seemed *foolish* for God to do was really God's wisdom, and what looked like *weakness* in God was stronger than human strength (I Corinthians 1:25). – The apostle Paul had to explain that to me several times before I started to understand it.

But that's what I did after God raised our Jesus from the dead. I left my home in Capernaum and followed the disciples as they went out, preaching the gospel: *The time has come! The kingdom of God has come near. Repent, and believe the good news!*

And that's why I've come to speak to you today. The good news of God in Jesus Christ is for *you*, too! He died to show you how much he loves you. He died to show the world that *love* and *peace* are good, and that following him changes everything. When you follow Jesus, it doesn't matter where you've come from. It only matters where you're going.

So go with God, dear friends! Follow Jesus, and he will give you the desires of your heart! (Psalm 37:4)