

## **Bible Assumptions**

Today we're continuing in our Epiphany season series, *Jesus, Man of Mystery*. Friday evening I was talking with a former student through Facebook Messenger – that's not my usual go-to mode of communication, folks – I don't have that as an app, so I miss messages on there. I'll put it this way – if you need me in a hurry, don't contact me through Facebook! It's easier and faster for you to just send me a text message directly to my cellphone, and that number is in your bulletin week after week!

Anyhow, this former student and I were talking about the Bible, specifically the Gospels, who wrote them, and when. It was an interesting conversation. We get in this mindset sometimes that the Bible fluttered down out of heaven and landed in the laps of King James, Martin Luther, or some other saint of the Church. At one time, I believed that's how we got the Bible. That's not at all accurate!

This particular young man thought that the Gospels were written by the apostles. So I told him about Luke. I don't want to burst any bubbles here, but Luke wasn't one of the original twelve disciples. Luke was a Gentile doctor, who had been converted by Paul on one of the missionary journeys. Luke collected stories about Jesus, and the Church, and compiled them into the Gospel of Luke and Book of Acts for a Gentile benefactor he had. That's just one example of how God uses people to carry His message to others!

## **Isaiah and the Babylonian Exile**

The Bible is full of stories, teachings, and prophecies. It offers us great insights into God's nature, and our lives as people. The passage we heard this morning, from the Book of Isaiah the prophet, unfolds against the backdrop of the Babylonian exile. This was a period of deep sorrow for the ancient Israelites. Isaiah speaks to a nation in need of reassurance, urging them to recognize the majesty and power of God.

That passage climaxes with a declaration of hope and confidence in God's power to sustain. Ironically, we most often hear it during services of death and resurrection. "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint," (Isaiah 40:31). That particular passage's overall message is one of encouragement, and focuses on the enduring strength we receive from trusting in God alone – even in the shadow of death.

This morning's Gospel lesson picks up where we left off last week. Jesus and His early disciples are in Capernaum and the region of Galilee. Jesus has been healing

people, and casting out demons – and today He continues to work these miracles. If you have a Bible or Bible app, turn with me to Mark 1:29-39. **Read Mark 1:29-39.**

### **Simon's Sick Mother-in-Law**

Jesus has just healed a demon-possessed man in the synagogue, and now Mark tells us, “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,” (Mark 1:29-30). In those days, people didn’t know a whole lot about diseases – viral or bacterial infections. We don’t know if Simon Peter’s mother-in-law had the flu, a cold, or if she had been down with this fever for a few weeks. The point is, that she was under the weather, and was so sick that she was unable to go about her regular routines.

Have you ever experienced something like that? You get so sick and ran down, you just don’t feel like you can do anything? I have. Back in the Fall of 2020, when COVID went through our house, I could barely get out of bed. Kendra will tell you I’m like that anytime I get sick – you know, the whole “man cold” thing – but we all took turns mostly staying in bed during those days. When we get really down sick, what do we do – I mean, besides reaching for the phone to call the doctor, or to grab the over-the-counter stuff that we think will make us feel better?

I hope we pray! We should be praying on a regular, routine basis. I mean multiple times a day we should be spending time in prayer. Paul even tells us in one of his letters to the church at Thessaloniki, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you,” (1 Thess. 5:16-17). Prayer is us talking with God – and we see the disciples do that in the Gospel lesson today. “They immediately told Jesus about her,” (Mark 1:30b). What does Jesus do? What does God do when we pray? He answers. He responds. He acts – especially when we pray in His will, for the things that He wants.

### **Jesus Heals Her**

“So Jesus went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them,” (verse 31). That’s remarkable! The lady had been sick and in bed, and Jesus takes her hand, helps her up, and she feels so great that she starts putting a meal on for them. Talk about a quick recovery! Her healing truly is a miracle.

Like nearly every Gospel story about Jesus performing a miracle, the word spread quickly. “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,” (verses 32-34). People in need of Jesus’ healing touch are flocking to Him. As much as Jesus insists that His identity is

kept secret, it's hard to not notice that the people who need healing are also people who have to live their lives in secret.

We've talked before about how people were ostracized from the community in those days. If they were demon-possessed, they lived lives hidden away from their neighbors – one account in the Gospels tells of a demon-possessed man who lived among the tombs. People who had leprosy were put outside their village, and anytime a healthy person came near them, they had to shout, "Unclean! Unclean!" at the tops of their lungs to avoid physical contact. Can you imagine a loved one or a family member not being allowed to come into their own home, because of an illness? Can you imagine not being allowed to even hug them? That's the way things were done in those days.

## **PostSecret Project**

Jesus did amazing things in the lives of these unnamed people in today's Gospel account. He continues to do great and amazing things in our lives today, if we're willing to let Him. The healing that Jesus gives all these people not only makes them whole and accepted back into community, but also releases them from a life of living in secret. With their new lease on life and freedom from their deepest secrets, they can fully discover ways they are called to follow Jesus. Do you have a deep secret from which you need freedom? Turn it over to Jesus – you can trust Him to take care of it for you – and He'll help surround you with a community of people who have also turned things over to Him!

A guy named Frank Warren started the PostSecret Project. He collects people's secrets. It started when he handed out 300 self-addressed postcards in Washington, DC, asking people to share a secret they had never told anyone. He then shared many of the secrets people had written on the postcards on his PostSecret website.

Some of the secrets are funny: "I give decaf to customers who are rude to me at Starbucks." Some are shocking: "Everyone who knew me before 9/11 believes I'm dead." Some are soulful: "Dear birth mother, I have great parents. I found love. I'm happy." Others are sad: "When people I love leave voicemails on my phone, I always save them in case they die tomorrow and I have no other way of hearing their voice ever again."

## **Secrets! Secrets! Secrets!**

Secrets revealed have a way of freeing us to live into our identity, accept ourselves for who we are, and connect us to our deepest humanity – and others we have yet to meet. Frank Warren says, "The secrets I receive reflect the full spectrum of complicated issues that many of us struggle with every day: intimacy, trust, meaning, humor, and desire." The PostSecret Project gives a venue where unheard voices could be heard – and untold stories could be shared.

Just as quickly as Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law, she was quickly restored to her family and community. Besides "waiting on them," what else do you suppose the lady did once she was healed? For the many who were healed and freed, what kind of joy do you think they found, by living freely and openly, rather than in secretive shadows on the fringes of society? What secrets keep you from living fully? Is it shame about something you did in your past?

Jesus already knows. He understands and loves you anyway. In a minute we'll receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion. In the silence, pour out your heart to God, and let Him bring healing!

### **Even Jesus Prayed**

Near the conclusion of our Gospel lesson today we catch a glimpse of an important practice, that I hope you'll make a recurring habit found in multiple moments each day, especially if you've realized this morning that you need to "spill the beans" to Jesus on some secret that's holding you prisoner. "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," (Mark 1:35). Even Jesus, God-in-flesh and the Son of God, had frequent, moment-by-moment conversations with God the Father in prayer. Even Jesus prayed. Even in His fully God, and fully Human Perfection, He was driven to God in prayer.

Being in near constant communication with His Father allowed Jesus to do all the things which Jesus did in the pages of Holy Scripture. When we follow the example of Christ and fully surrender ourselves – including our secrets – to God, we will be freed from all that holds us back. We'll be able to connect with one another and live fully in community and openness.

**Prayer:** Everlasting God, You give strength to the powerless and power to the faint; You raise up the sick and cast out demons. Make us agents of healing and wholeness, that Your good news may be made known to the ends of Your creation. Amen.