

Epiphany V Year B 2012

“He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her and she began to serve them.”

In just a few weeks in our reading of Mark, we find Jesus’ and his disciples’ ministry in full swing....no beating around the bush for Mark...Jesus is announced...he’s baptized...he calls disciples...and they’re off...casting out demons...healing the sick, and we’re only in the first chapter.... They continue preaching the Good News that God is love and that God is among them....that all are equals....that their dignity will not be compromised by the injustice around them....that all have a birthright to live into their true personhood....soon the exuberance of this fast paced and fiery ministry will be quashed by the powers that be in Jerusalem who are threatened by this powerful movement which has shaken the very pivots of the status quo to the core.

You have heard me preach and teach enough about the Gospel of Mark to know that it is mostly about two central themes: Baptism....that is to say, the life and ministry of the Baptized, living in the way of the Christ....and the other: resurrection....despite the mysterious fact that there is no resurrection appearance in Mark....but you will also remember that in the healing narratives this text is shot through with the root word for resurrection...the raised paralytic....the raised little girl....a dozen or so of these resurrection encounters....so Mark is bidding us to look for resurrection in our daily lives....two weeks ago I added a third theme about which Mark is concerned and that is the issue of time...specifically the time of God’s coming reign....For Mark the tension between the now-ness of the kingdom of God, the present signs of the kingdom ...and the not yet-ness of the kingdom, the promised future coming kingdom ...for Mark this tension is decidedly tilting to the now, in the present...God’s reign unfolding as we speak....He uses the word immediately over and over again...twice in our reading two weeks ago and twice in our reading for today....So this rhetoric that Mark weaves, to put it simply, is that the Baptized are about the business of resurrection, Jesus being the exemplar thereof....and that the business of bearing this resurrection life to the world is for now....that resurrection is immediately present....as the need for raised lives is immediately present: It is our vocation to raise lives from the death throes of injustice, oppression and indignity, to raise the sick, to lift up all of low estate. Resurrection the vocation of the Baptized.

In today’s reading we begin with... “As soon as they left the Synagogue.” The NRSV says, “as soon as” but the Greek is clearly the same oft occurring word for immediately....Our bulletin copy is off of the Episcopal Church lectionary page which sometimes takes license with the beginning phrase of a reading for clarity’s sake, since our readings are chopped up Sunday to Sunday and we can lose track of the narrative.... here the lectionary gurus add Jesus to the first line...so we’ll know just who it was who left the Synagogue....here they do a sloppy job however, first, the word is they....they left... the text says, so the gurus should have accounted for the disciples as well....Jesus and his disciples left the Synagogue....but more importantly they leave off the word immediately, which by now you know is extremely important to Mark’s theology, but I digress, even though this stuff gets my motor running.

In our reading today we have the first resurrection appearance in Mark in the healing of Simon Peter's mother in law, resurrection a principal theme... We are told that Jesus took her by the hand and lifted her up... and there it is... *egerin*... the root for resurrection... she is raised from her illness... as you know illness can isolate, and can impinge upon one's dignity... she is raised, healed, brought back into the family circle... a circle now more inclusive than her immediate family... Jesus enters the family circle risking ritual impurity (the author has already told us that this is on the Sabbath) and he risks catching the illness himself... something only a family member would do... this is an intimate familial gesture... an intimate act of love... which means that living a vocation of resurrection broadens the boundaries of family... the family circle shifting wider, more inclusive, new brothers, new sisters... a paradigmatic change no less... blood kin now the blood of all the faithful... Family now a broader and strengthened fellowship... this fellowship of Jesus, our family, who live each for each, and live for those not yet adopted; a fellowship who seeks to reconcile the family of humankind into one.

But the climax of this story comes next... after the mother in law is healed she begins serving them. The word for serving is *deaconos*, the word from which we get the word deacon, or server, minister... So here and right now I want to declare this day in the church, wish the bishop was here for this... here and now I want to declare this Sunday, Epiphany V Year B a major feast day in the church... because what we have just heard read is an account of the birth of the church... the operative dynamic of the church being: that we are first loved by God, and then we reciprocate such love by loving others... the woman is healed through a loving act... all acts of sacrifice are acts of love... and in gratitude, filled with the love of God she serves this widening world around her... this is the unbroken circle of love that we call the church, that widening circle which will make all things well and whole... the life of faith is born because God first loved us, and therefore we must give that love to others... that is what we celebrate from Sunday to Sunday, that is what we are nurtured for at this table... that we are a part of this unbroken circle... this unbroken cycle of Love that is forever restoring, forever renewing, forever raising up. Pentecost often gets the glory calling it the birthday of the church... but Pentecost is about the gift of the Spirit which is present in every act of love, in each raising up... but the real birth, the first child of the faith is that Jesus raised one in Love and in turn she loved others... simple and profound... the church, born of a woman, Jesus born of a woman we say in our Eucharistic liturgy... and we the living, raised body of Christ, we the church born of a woman, raised to serve... my mother for one would have no problem with that theology... she's always said that while we men are out doing our thing... women have held the church together since it began... but don't get her started on that.

Sunny, you soon will have been brought into this unbreakable circle of Love by your family because they love you... but your family grows greater... you soon will belong to a family that spans innumerable generations, a family that includes the living and the dead... a family that is raised for love... a family that is called to love the world into what God intends for it... to be in the family of the Baptized you are to be a world changer... so we have high hopes for you... and we pledge our help to you, our teaching, our nurture, so that you may walk this extravagant and dangerous way of love... and

what you learn along this way, this way of Christ, we hope you will teach us what you learn as well.

Mary and I and your delegates have just attended our annual diocesan convention. On Friday Mayor Sam Jones greeted us briefly, but in his short address he decried what he called the moral decay in our society especially among youth, and made the statement that it is only people of faith who can change that...I believe that....We must allow the Christ to take us by the hand, raise us up to continue his work in our world....knowing that because we are loved we must love.

Sunny, Welcome to this great circle, welcome to the family of God...may you and may we all learn the way of Love...let us learn to love as God loves....loving our neighbor as God first loved us....the way the church began in the beginning....and the way the church, the people of God will be.....and that's for now and always.... on earth as it is in heaven.