

Homily for the 5th Sunday in Ordinary Times

February 3-4, 2018

Readings : Job 7: 1-4, 6-7; 1 Corinthians 9: 16-19, 22-23; Mark 1: 29-39

Preacher: Margot Van Etten

Imagine how stunning Jesus' appearance in Capernaum was. He stands up to read and teach at the Sabbath synagogue service—and with a word, casts out a raving demon.

Coming into Peter's house, he heals a sick woman with a hand clasp. By sunset, when the Sabbath is over, word has spread and everyone brings their sick, their demon-infested—all who need healing. The mass of suffering humanity, whose lives echo the words of Job in our depressing first reading, suddenly and beyond all expectation or possibility, see happiness again. Hope, healing, restoration to all—the joy of life has descended upon them and *they are made whole*.

Jesus' preaching and teaching is always accompanied by healing. The ancient formula, "the glory of God is the human fully alive," is here made visible: God comes among humankind and restores the glory so long lost—casting out evil, disease and fear, drawing people to the vision of peace, loving kindness, wholeness and, ultimately, making death itself the gateway to full, radiant life.

Jesus is God's healing presence among the people. The Eastern Church emphasizes this healing aspect of Jesus' activity in the world and in the Church: sin itself is a disease, a sort of spiritual HIV, and Jesus came to heal us in body, mind and spirit, to bring us into the glory of his own risen life, to share in the very intimacy of the Trinity through our union with him. And, like any good physician, he has left us medicine (the sacraments) and therapies (the spiritual practices, devotions and meditation) and all the riches of our faith. And most especially his presence with us and within us—in the Eucharist, in the Spirit lavished upon us, in the grace that enfolds each moment of our lives.

All of this can sound very fancy and otherworldly, but it casts a very practical light on our lives and our calling as followers of Christ. The more we open ourselves to

him in the silent depths of our being, the more we truly *get* how totally God loves us, the more we ourselves become that healing presence to others.

We are called to be the healing presence through which all the ills and demons that infest our world are cast out. We are called to be the healing presence casts out the fear and anxiety that pervade our times and spawn the hatred and anger, prejudice and violence that deform so much of society.

We are called to be the small lamps that, one by one, help to dispel the darkness by our lives, our love, our presence. We, individually, can't heal the whole world, but we can shed that light and warmth on our own little corner. And if enough lamps are lit.... darkness is overwhelmed with light.

We are in the run-up to Lent, so now is the perfect time to ask ourselves what would help us to be more fully healed and to become more of that healing presence. Most particularly this year, where am I infected with the fear, the anxiety and animosity that have become such an epidemic? Where do I need the medicines of self-awareness, repentance and reconciliation? What will help me to open my heart more fully? How do I bring awareness of God's immense love from my head to my heart?

My prayer for myself and for all of us is just that: May we all become so deeply aware of God's love that we become beacons of that love and agents of God's healing presence to everyone we encounter, now and in every moment of our lives.