

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
February 4, 2018  
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany  
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

2 Kings 4:8-37  
Psalm 142  
I Corinthians 9:16-23  
Mark 1:29-39

As we continue through this season after the Epiphany, we continue to be exposed to events and circumstances that reveal Jesus more fully as the promised Messiah, the divine Son of God, the One who has come as the Light of the world.

And as I said last week, Mark sees the world as being under the control of hostile and evil forces, bound the “Strong Man” as it were, and in need of an even stronger Man to come and free it from bondage.

Last week we saw Jesus take authority over the demonic realm and the evil forces behind it. Today we see perhaps an even greater example of his divine power and authority.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus takes his first four disciples to Simon’s house, where Simon’s mother-in-law is in bed with a fever. Now in our modern age, when we contract a fever, we can go to our doctor and get a prescription for Amoxicillin or Zithromax or some such. And typically the fever will subside rather uneventfully.

But in the first century, a fever caused by an infection was often a death sentence. Mark tells us here that Jesus takes Peter’s mother-in-law by the hand and

“raises” her. The word he uses here is a word frequently used for “resurrection” in the New Testament. It’s as if Mark is saying here that Peter’s mother-in-law is as “good as dead,” and Jesus raises her up from that death.

There are two other places in Mark’s Gospel where this same resurrection theme appears. In Mark 5, Jesus is approached by a man named Jairus, who was the ruler of the Synagogue. He comes to Jesus and kneels before him, saying: “My little girl is sick and near the point of death. Please come and lay your hands on her so that she may be made well and live.”

Jesus starts off toward Jairus’ house, when some of Jairus’ servants meet them and say: “Your daughter is dead. There is no point in bothering Jesus any further with this.”

But Jesus said to Jairus: “Do not fear; only believe.”

They proceed on to the house where the little girl lays, and people are already mourning her passing. Jesus says: “Why all of this commotion? This child is not dead, but asleep.”

Mark tells us: “They laughed at him.”

Jesus kicks them out of the house, and goes to the little girl. He takes her by the hand and says to her: “Little girl, I say to you, arise” (Mark 5:41). And immediately the little girl got up and walked.

A second instance where this word for “resurrection” is used is in chapter 9, where a man brings his little boy to Jesus who is possessed by an evil spirit. Jesus commands the spirit to come out of the child, and when it does, the boy falls to the ground like a corpse. Mark tells us that most of those who were there said, “He is dead” (Mk. 9:26).

But Jesus takes him by the hand and lifts him up, and he *arises*.

In these two cases, and in our Gospel text this morning, it is the same word used to describe what is happening. It is the word for “resurrection.” And in crafting his Gospel like this, Mark is making it abundantly clear that Jesus has power not only to teach and to exercise authority over the evil realm, but he also has the power to *raise the dead*.

This story about Peter’s mother-in-law, then, is a specific example of Mark’s larger story that shows Jesus waging a cosmic battle to liberate the whole world from its bondage to hostile and evil forces. Mark hints at this reality when he then says that subsequent to Peter’s mother-in-law being healed, the *whole city* comes in the evening to Simon and Andrew’s house, where Jesus heals all who need it. The “whole city” is an image or metaphor revealing that Jesus’ power extends to the whole creation. And Jesus’ power is not merely confined to teaching and healing. Jesus has the power *literally* to bring the dead to life.

I did not know Peter's mother-in-law. Nor did I ever meet Jairus' little girl, or the little boy who was so troubled that Mark writes about.

But I did know a man by the name of Bill Molitor. Bill was actually here at Epworth back in December when he and his wife attended our Lessons and Carols service.

Bill underwent a quadruple bypass surgery last Sunday. He went home from the hospital on Wednesday afternoon. In the early hours of Thursday morning, he died in his sleep.

It's one thing to believe that Jesus can take the hand of a little boy or a little girl that we do not know and say to them: "Arise, get up." But that belief can sort of hover at a theoretical or intellectual level.

But I'm here to tell you this morning that Jesus Christ has the power to say those life giving words *to someone you know and love, someone you have lost*. And he has the power to speak those words even to you, when your time to leave this world comes.

*Do you believe that?*

There is one other interesting little detail here in this story about Peter's mother-in-law that should not be missed, because it has a direct application to us. Mark tells us that after Jesus "raises her up," the fever leaves Peter's mother-in-law, and she "served them" (Mark 1:31).

Think with me for a moment about the sequence here. We have a person who is as good as dead, who is raised up, resurrected to new life, and subsequent to being raised up, begins to serve.

Does that remind you of anything? It should.

All of us were at one point “dead” in our trespasses and sins. All of us, like sheep, had gone astray, seeking our own way and our own will. And then we went under the waters of baptism, and in our baptism we were washed and regenerated and made new, and raised up to newness of life.

But the Church has always taught that baptism is not just about being made new, it is also a *commission to service*. We are not merely saved *from* sin and death; we are saved *for service to Christ and the world that he loves*. In our baptism we are commissioned and given grace for that service. The experience of Peter’s mother-in-law foreshadows and becomes a type of our own experience. Having been raised up through the waters of baptism and given new life, there is work for us to do.

As we come to the Lord’s Table this morning, the grace that He offers you through bread and wine is life giving, life restoring, grace. It is power to make all things new.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.