

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany – Year B

PROCLAIMING THE MESSAGE

Mark 1:29-39

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Analysis by Ben Williams

29As soon as [Jesus and the disciples] left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. 32That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. 35In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." 38He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." 39And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.



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“On the cross, Jesus faces death and despair, remains there with us, and then breaks open a new reality in the resurrection.”

Author’s Note: In choosing to interpret illness in this text, this author does not seek to offer medical advice. Just as one would turn to a pastor for spiritual maladies, please consult a medical health professional for any physical, mental, or

emotional concerns.

DIAGNOSIS: Left Behind

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): *Everyone is Searching*

“Looking for someone? We all are. But who? We don’t want to be alone. But when it comes to belonging, we’re confused. And our culture is confused. We are together, all alone.” This opening paragraph in Joseph Meyers’ book, *The Search to Belong*, aptly captures a key tension we all feel. The world is more connected than ever, and yet, isolation and loneliness are rampant. Everyone is searching for meaning and belonging.

So, it is surprising when everyone is out looking for him that Jesus makes plans to move on. Why would he leave when there is assumably more illness to cure in that town? The whole town was crowded around his door. All who were sick were brought to him. Yet only many were cured. And Jesus left.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): *Proclaiming the Illness*

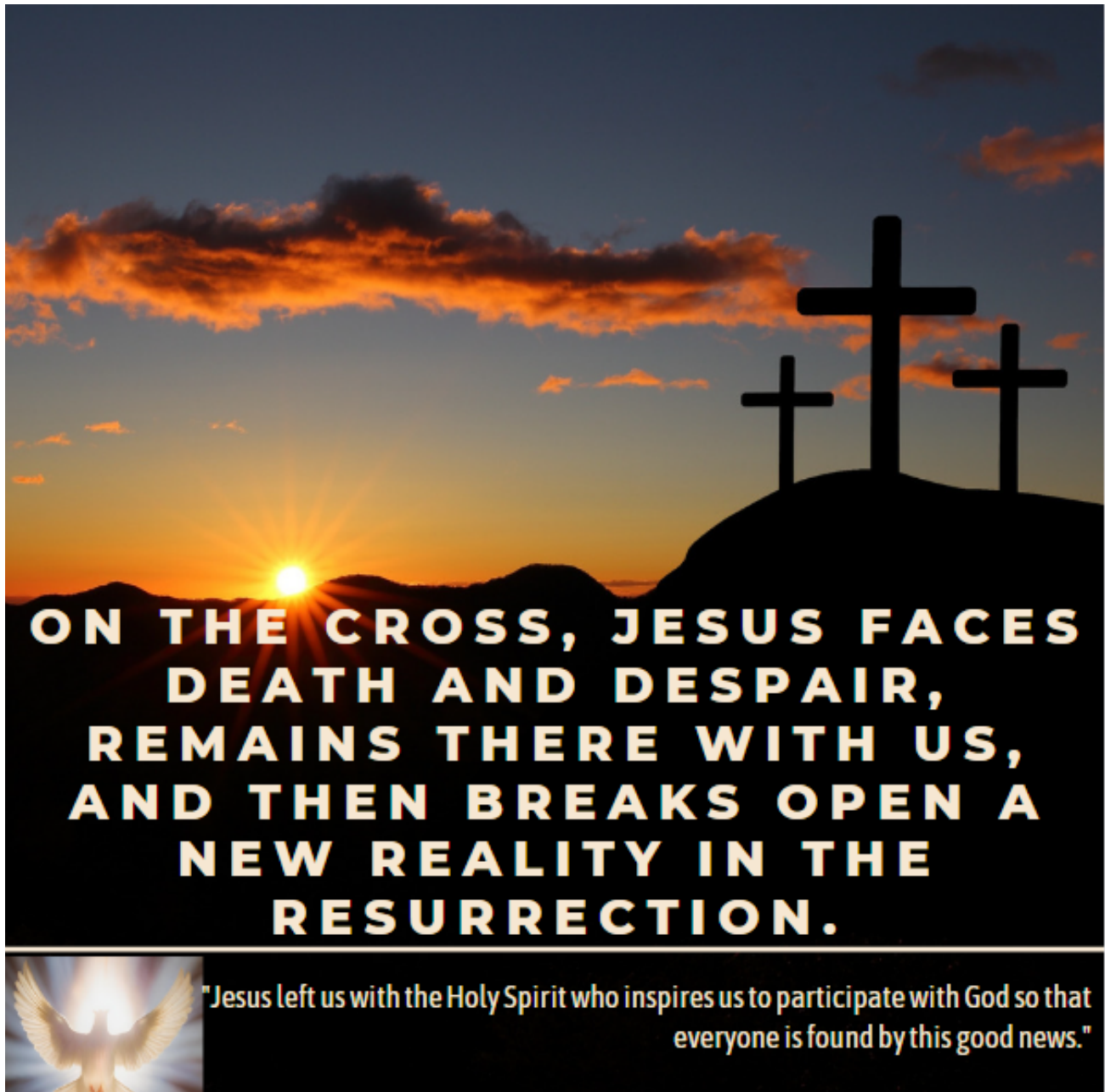
The whole town was crowded around Jesus’ door. The healing that Jesus was administering was clearly significant in that village. Perhaps demons and disease are all this community had known for some time. Perhaps all they could imagine for themselves was the illness that plagued their village.

What is that old phrase? “When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.” When all you have is illness or loneliness or vanity, everything looks like death and despair. No wonder the disciples were out hunting for Jesus! This was a matter of life and death.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): *Down and Out*

And what remained after Jesus left? After the glimmer of hope

faded, what remained? After the intoxication of expectancy waned, what remained? Seemingly, only death and despair. The illness has knocked us down and out. Is that all there is for us, O God?



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PROGNOSIS: Going Ahead

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): *Lifted Up*

Jesus does not leave us alone; he goes ahead of us. On the cross, Jesus faces death and despair, remains there with us, and then breaks open a new reality in the resurrection. As we are told at the end of Mark's story, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth; he is not here... he is going ahead of you to Galilee" (Mark 16:6-7). And from that vantage point, Jesus reaches back, takes us by the hand, and lifts us up with him; just as he did with Simon's mother-in-law.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): *Proclaiming the Message*

And suddenly, we have a new trust and a new story to tell. A message of good news! A message that inspired Simon's mother-in-law to rise and minister to all in the room. The Holy Spirit plants this good news so deep within us so that we might not see anything but hope in the promise of God. The former loneliness and demons are not permitted to speak; so that the only message that remains is this good news.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): *Everyone is Found*

As it turns out, in all our searching for meaning and belonging, Jesus has been walking ahead of us. And this message of good news emboldens us to join Simon's mother-in-law in ministering to all who are searching. Jesus leaves us with the Holy Spirit who inspires us to participate with God so that everyone is found by this good news.