

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

FAITH BEYOND ALL FEVER

Mark 1:29-39

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Analysis by Michael Hoy

29As soon as they 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 neighbouring 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.

DIAGNOSIS: Fever's Hold On Us

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Fevered people*

Even on Superbowl Sunday, the fever pitch in Mark's gospel can be quite overwhelming. How overwhelming? First one fever, then another, and another, until a "whole city" of fevered individuals are gathered just outside the door. Understand that the fever is at a high pitch-and that the one doing the pitching is demonic, claiming lives by the bushel. That door, by the way, is ours (maybe our church door, or the doors of our homes). We are not spared the fever by being on the inside. On the contrary, even Simon gets fevered, together with his companions, so that they "hunt" for Jesus, infected by that same fever (not unlike those who would later "hunt" for Jesus on the night of his betrayal): "Everyone is searching for you!" It has spread, this demonic fever, to the whole world.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Possessed*

What's more, this fever has a hold on us. We are possessed by it, bound by it. It has claimed us, and will not let us go, no matter how much we personally struggle, toss or turn, or think we can come up with the right medications and vaccinations (our antidotes that give us false hope and never address the deeper malady of our fever). Despite our unending and misguided search, we possess no cure. The fever has darkened our minds and hearts, together with our bodies and beings, in unfaith.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Dark*

As the evening settles in, so does the darkness on our fevered lives. Time is running out on us. That creeping darkness is very much like death-and death, we know, also to be God's final verdict of darkness on our lives. In our fevered, possessed state, it is, indeed "still very dark."

PROGNOSIS: Faith in Jesus, Holding Us

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Jesus, the Cure*

Yet in our darkness, we do have a prayer-a Pray-er-Who is for us. He would occupy the same deserted space of fever's deep,

dark hold (we are given a glimpse in v. 35 of his final journey from the place of his betrayal to and through the cross). He touches us in our fevered darkness by letting the darkness so deeply touch him, contaminate him, make him dark and even alone bearing the forces of the “still very dark” state of our being. But his taking that into himself is also the very cure from all of fever’s hold on our lives.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Lifted up*

That message lifts our faith to trust that there is now a truly New Champion who has come to rule our lives. There is no fever, no possession, no bondage that can stop him from lifting us up. He has reached out to us and taken us by the hand, with his Word (proclaiming the message) and his real presence, touching us with peace and favor. No longer does darkness rule in our hearts and minds, but his message that he came to deliver.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Serving people*

In this gospel narrative, it is a woman who is first to leave her fevered bed and serve (wait on) “them,” not the least of them being her own fevered son-in-law, Simon. Note also how by the end of this gospel of Mark, it is other women who would first come “in the morning” to see the open tomb, and be charged to wait on Simon and all the other fevered disciples; they carried the radical (truly radical-as in “to the root”) cure, that Jesus the Christ has taken our fever unto death and is risen beyond it, for us all. What an overwhelming cheerful antidote that turns out to be: “go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you” (16:7). Remember Peter (and all the fevered disciples), as Jesus “went throughout Galilee” (v. 39)? “That is what I came out to do” (v. 38), Jesus explains: searching for you, waiting on you! So, following the One who first served us, we seek out people at our own fever pitch, in all the neighboring towns outside our door who are waiting to be

served.