

Sermon Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 4, 2018

Mark 1:29-39

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read, especially these words: **“Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.”**

As people, we like glory, don't we? We make it our life's end to strive for glory. For proof look no further than the event that many of us will be observing today: the Super Bowl. The Super Bowl is all about the glory of being the best team in the most popular pro sport in our nation at this moment. Talk about glory. But of course, we're no different. We like the glory that comes when the Church looks good publicly, like when the comfort dogs get on Good Morning America. We like the glory that comes when we find out a famous popular person expresses Christian faith. Or we like it when our country shows its strength or mettle and we can glorify these things. In fact, some of you may remember reading the book “The Rage Against God” by Peter Hitchens, a book read in the Summer Book Reading before I came. He describes some of this in relation to even confusing the Christian Faith with the English Patriotism surrounding Churchill, something we could perhaps relate to if we examine words of the Battle Hymn of the Republic, which in its lesser known verses describes a self-righteous satisfaction at the death of the enemies of our nation, a consideration made irrespective of the people's religious beliefs. In short, the reality is there. We like glory. We're drawn to it. In fact, this even influences how we see God and His glory. What do I mean?

Well, to start let's look at what the readings for this morning describe. First of all the Old Testament, listen again to what we hear there: **“Do you not know? Do you not hear?... It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.”** What do you hear there? You hear of power, right? The Glory of God in His Power! The Glory of the God who creates, who created the world out of nothing! You can hear it in those words, in the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth, and then what? He sits above it and stretches out the heavens like a curtain. You can picture it, the earth, and then the heavens opening up.

In fact, I knew a member at my vicarage congregation, a gentleman who is now doing post doctorate work in astrophysics who said this explains how these objects so far away can have light that's here without the earth being billions of years old. He said we could

understand the light as starting here and being stretched out. And as we think about that, there is the glory of God in His power!

And as we look at the gospel lesson, we see this in Jesus too. There He is, God in the flesh, as we keep pointing out in Epiphany. God in the flesh, coming with that power to overcome these demons. Listen to that again, **“And he healed 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.”** And you can see it again, can’t you? The God through whom the world was created, the strong Word, incarnate and in that strength and in that power crushing demons into submission, crushing illness with His miraculous healing. Jesus flexing His might, showing off His guns. In fact, listen even to what Mark tells us about the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law: **“He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her.”** Now it doesn’t come through quite as much in the English, but this word for taking her by the hand has an image of seizing her. He grabs her by the hand. Jesus in His might picks her up and pulls her out of the pit of her sickness. Again, the power that is here! The Glory of God in His power!

This is what we like as people, we like that power! We’re like Tim “the Toolman” Taylor, we want more power! We want our God to be this God with more power! We want to know God works. We want to see it evidenced, and if we don’t then there’s trouble!

Think about it, if I was here performing miracles week in and week out, what would happen? Do you think you all would be able to find a place to sit? No! The pews would be packed, this would be standing room only. We’d have to open the overflow seating and we’d have to expand the sound system into the parish hall. It would be stuffed in here, because this is the kind of stuff that draws a crowd, isn’t it? In fact, we see that in Jesus doing it because the whole town came to bring people to be healed. Mark tells us that **“the whole city was gathered together at the door.”** This is what we want as people. That’s why we like the stories about how God saved me from my drug addiction, or how God rescued me from my life of crime. How I prayed and God made my last dollar work in my new business so that now I’m a millionaire. We love this story, because it shows God’s power and His might!

But as I say all of this, you might be confused. You might be confused because you can sense the tone that I am using as I say all of this. You heard me say that we get God’s glory wrong, you can hear me saying how we like all of this stuff, and you might be confused because it maybe sounds like I’m saying we shouldn’t like Jesus healing people, like we shouldn’t thank God when He spares people from horrible lives of addiction, poverty, and ruin. Let me be clear, there is nothing wrong with thanking God for those

things. There is absolutely nothing wrong with us being thankful for God's power and His might and His miraculous help for people in this life. There is nothing wrong with that. We must thank God for these things, we must also understand them properly. What do I mean?

Well, think about this: when you look at God's power, at His glory in creation, what does it tell you about God? It tells you that He's strong, right? It tells you that He is capable of doing all things. But what does it tell you about how God views you? What happens when we see this power demonstrated in earthquakes, in tornados, in Hurricane Harveys and Irmes? What happens then?

Or what about when it comes to healing? And this happens, I have heard multiple stories from my parishioners over the course of time where they have a cousin, or a sibling, or a parent who was miraculously healed. Thanks be to God, right? Yes, thanks be God! Thanks be to God even when the healing occurs through medical treatments, through surgery, radiation, chemo. Thanks be to God! But what about when the healing doesn't come? What happens then? What does that tell you about God, about how God looks at you? Where is the joy in that glory? Where is the comfort in that power?

As we think about this, then we see why Jesus said what He said: **“Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.”** How often do we think about that? That Jesus came out into His ministry to preach? We think about the healings, the exorcisms, the flexing of the muscles, but how often do we think about His preaching? I just made the point that if I performed miracles then the doors would be bursting at the seams, and it goes for Jesus too. He could have had the whole world after Him. But what did He come for? He came to preach. He came to speak His message. He came to preach the Gospel, as Mark tells us earlier in Chapter One. In fact, as we look at this word for preaching, from what I read, in the Greek this is the heralding of an event. Just like a herald would go from town to town heralding the end of a war, or heralding the coronation of a new king, Jesus was heralding an event. What event? The event of this God entering into human flesh. The event of the Kingdom of God being at hand. The event of time being fulfilled. Finally, the event of the cross.

In fact as we say this, something Luther said as he was commenting on the Psalms was this: **“The cross alone is our theology.”** In other words, the cross alone is how we know God. The cross is how God is revealed. Sure we might like to get an idea of God from the power of creation and from the miracles, but in the cross we see what it really all means. It means that God isn't mad at you any more for your sin. Yes you deserve His wrath, but it's been paid. It means you don't have to worry that God is punishing you for something when things go wrong. You don't have to worry that He's going to crush you in

His power and anger. Jesus did it all for you. That's what He was preaching. He was preaching the cross. And that's what He calls me to preach: the cross: the event of the cross for you. He wants the cross preached. Not just read in your Bible—yes read your Bible. But hear the cross preached in His House. For you. The cross on which your sins died, your sins; something you know because of baptism. The cross on which Jesus' body and blood were hanged, the body and blood given and shed for you for forgiveness and now fed to you that you would know this is for you. This is that preaching! The preaching of the cross, for you!

In fact, as I brought up Luther, I don't know if you know this, but Luther even encouraged making the sign of the cross as a reminder of this and it's connection to our baptism. We often associate the sign of the cross with Roman Catholicism, but it's a Lutheran thing too. If you look in your Catechism to where Luther gives instruction for prayer, He says, "In the morning when you get up, make the sign of the holy cross, and say: 'In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.'" The reminder that as God baptized us into His Holy Name, as He put His Name on us, He joined us to Christ's death on the cross, so that we would be raised in His resurrection. The cross is our theology, and the cross is what we preach, just as Paul says, "**I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.**" And as I say that, what then do we see in this preaching? What do we see in this cross that is preached? We see the glory of God in His love for you.

So yes, we as people love glory. We love the glory of this world. We love the glory of might and power. We love the glory Jesus showed and shows when He healed. But in the end, where do we see the greatest glory? In what Jesus came out to do: in the preaching of the cross. You see, it's in the preaching of the cross that the power and majesty isn't just something good abstractly, it's not just good for Peter's mother-in-law and that man healed in the synagogue, it's good for you, because there on the cross is the death of your sin, the atonement for all that you've done. There on the cross is the proof that God loves you, because He promises eternal life for you in the resurrection. Yes, what a gift this preaching is, because in that you know that this glory belongs to you. You don't have to guess about it, you don't have to worry about it. You only hear and receive it, because it is the glory of God's promise to you. Amen.