

Epiphany 5-February 4, 2024

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Psalms 147:6, 1 Corinthians 9:16-23, Mark 1:29-39

"Lifted Up" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from his son, Jesus Christ, Amen

The Lord lifts up the lowly but casts down the wicked to the ground. Jesus came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel.

In the gospel reading from last week which immediately preceded what you just heard from the gospel of Mark today, Jesus had just called his first four disciples by simply saying to them, "Follow me." Then, Jesus had amazed everyone in the synagogue with his new teaching which was delivered with authority. Then Jesus cast out the demons from the man who interrupted the worship service that day. At the end of the reading, we were told that after these things took place, at once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

These four first chosen disciples must have felt pretty good about their new calling at this point in Jesus' ministry. They were told to follow and up to this point that was all they had to do. They followed. They imagined their new calling to be filled with days of glory and fame as they followed behind Jesus. They had the understanding that they would be like someone who followed a state university football team from place to place. A team that was recognized by its gold and blue colors whose mascot had long ears that were always up on game day. They would be following someone who was like a team that completed their winning season by going to Texas to finish off their perfect winning record. They thought it would be fun to be called to simply follow behind Jesus. It is fun and exciting to follow and cheer on a successful person or a winning team.

These disciples who thought they would just follow Jesus were about to learn their true callings. They were not chosen to be cheerleaders. They were not chosen to be Jesus' bodyguards when he would later be attacked. They certainly weren't going to be good prayer partners for Jesus since they were never found joining Jesus in prayer. They either interrupted him when he was praying or were found asleep when he needed them most to pray with him.

In all of today's readings, the focus turns from watching what was drawing large crowds around Jesus to the disciples learning from Jesus what he really came to do and what they would be sent out to do. The astonishing news that Jesus had silenced the demons and cast them out from the man who appeared in the synagogue while Jesus was teaching on the Sabbath spread quickly around the town of Capernaum. It was the Sabbath day when Jesus had done this, but in all the amazement, no one seemed to notice that Jesus was breaking the third commandment of Remembering the Sabbath day. On that same evening, Jesus breaks it again when he along with his disciples go to Simon's house for the evening. Jesus breaks the third commandment by healing Peter's mother-in-law on the Sabbath day while keeping the fourth commandment by honoring his mother...in law who was sick in bed with a fever. The disciples watched on while Jesus took Simon's mother-in-law by the hand and lifted her up from her illness. She didn't get any time off for rehab. Her healing was complete, and she got up and went right back to work by serving Jesus and his disciples.

That would have been a good place to end the day. Crowds of people were amazed at Jesus' teaching. Jesus' healing on the Sabbath without anyone attacking him for not keeping the Sabbath by doing work that could have waited until the Sabbath was over. The fame of Jesus was spreading after Jesus demonstrated his power to silence demons and cast them out simply with this word. It would have been a pretty full day for Jesus by ending it by lifting Simon's mother-in-law out of bed and back into serving her house guests. It would have been great if the day had ended with a home cooked meal and having a night of rest.

But that is not how the day ended for Jesus. Since the sun had set, the Sabbath was over and those who had heard that Jesus had the power to cure the sick and cast out demons would not wait for morning to see if Jesus

would do for them what they had seen and heard he had done for others. Before Jesus finished his supper, Jesus was interrupted from what he was doing and went back to work. Capernaum wasn't the largest city in the region, but everyone from that town came to Simon's house to see what Jesus would do for them. Jesus was able to cure whatever disease needed to be cured and he shut up the mouths of every demon and cast everyone one of them out. The disciples watched and probably began to think that they would soon open clinics of their own and begin lifting people up from their sick beds. They did not know the complete meaning of what was meant by the psalmist who said that the Lord would lift up the lowly.

These disciples went to bed that night excited about what they thought ministry was all about. They were excited that they soon would be able to do what they had watched Jesus do and their fame would spread too.

Jesus might not have slept well that night as he watched his disciples getting misled about what following him was all about. Jesus got up early the next morning while it was still dark and found a deserted place to be alone and pray. His time in prayer was cut short as he was interrupted by his disciples who went hunting for him. After finding Jesus, they told him that everyone was searching for him. They wanted to lead Jesus back to Capernaum where he could perform some more acts of healing. However, Jesus did not go back to Capernaum with his disciples to lift people from their sick beds. Jesus told his disciples that they were going to the neighboring towns where "lifting up" was going to take on a new meaning. Jesus was going to proclaim the message of the gospel to people in other places for this is what he came to do, and this is what he was preparing his disciples to do. His disciples were not going to only become physicians to lift sickness from people, but they would become preachers that would lift sins from people so that they would be freed from their sins so that they too could better serve their neighbors.

Paul did not become a preacher to become famous. He had nothing to boast about unless it was Christ. Paul had no choice but to do what Jesus had called him to do. Paul considered his new calling as a preacher as an obligation that was laid on him. It was not a reward. Paul became a slave to Christ. Paul did whatever it took to win those who had never heard the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul previously had been crushing people with the law, but now he was lifting people up with the gospel.

Jesus continues to lift people up today through people that he calls by putting in their mouths his words to say. There is no question that Jesus still lifts people up from their sick beds so that they can once again serve their neighbors. We have seen this happen in our own parish this week. But Jesus also lifts up the faces of sinners who once were ashamed and had consciences filled with guilt. Jesus lifts them up with his gospel by proclaiming that they are forgiven. The woman who was caught in adultery and was brought before Jesus by the Pharisees hung her head in shame until Jesus forgave her sin and those who wanted her sin exposed so everyone would know were not given a chance by Jesus to compare her sins with theirs. Jesus simply asked them if they were without sin. Jesus didn't not ask them if their sins were less than hers. The lowly woman was lifted up immediately and the wicked accusers were cast down to the ground. And finally, Jesus proclaims that he will lift up to eternal life those whom he has chosen.

Many people including Jesus' own disciples had their own ideas of how Jesus should demonstrate his authority and power. Jesus teaches us again today what he came to do. Paul declared "Woe to me, if I don't proclaim the gospel". Jesus moved from one place to the next proclaiming a message of repentance and forgiveness. Jesus is with us today and has lifted you up from your burden of sin today. For this is what Jesus came to do. Amen.