

8.30.2020 Trinity 12 (Luke 4:31-44; Mark 1:29-34)

When we're studying the Bible with a desire to understand what both the human author and the Divine Author intend to communicate, it can be helpful to imagine that we are present in that particular place and time in history. A greater understanding of Scripture is often found when we read the written Word of God from the perspective of a shepherd watching over their flock by night, a Samaritan woman gathering water from Jacob's well in the heat of the day, or a fisherman out all night on the Sea of Galilee. If you've ever tried to take a step back and read the Bible in this way, then you know it can be very difficult to bridge the great divide of time and culture that separates us from these biblical events. At times it can be difficult, but that's not the case today as we consider these words from our Second Lesson: And Jesus "*arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever...*" (Luke 4:38).

This biblical event took place two thousand years ago, but we've all been there, haven't we. Flat on our back, lying in bed because we're sick or injured. It's not difficult to place ourselves in this story, to see things from the perspective of Peter's mother-in-law. When I read this passage, I'm immediately reminded of a few days, years ago, that I spent in a critical care hospital bed, flat on my back. With an IV, a catheter, a breathing tube forced down my throat and electrodes stuck to my body, I couldn't move, or even speak. I was alive, but my entire world was as small and flat as a hospital bed. The injury I suffered had left me confined this small, horizontal existence.

This is the situation in which we find Peter's mother-in-law this morning. Her illness has left her disconnected from family and friends and the many activities of daily life. Because of this fever her life is small and flat. She's confined to a horizontal existence, and because we all have some experience in this kind of situation, it's not hard to picture the scene that our lesson describes. Family and friends gathered around this woman they love, longing for her to rise up and return to the abundant, joyful fellowship that they once shared with her. This was their desire, so they asked Jesus to help her, and in Mark's account of this story we are told that Jesus "*took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her...*" (Mark 1:31).

Jesus *took her by the hand and lifted her up*, and Peter's mother-in-law was no longer confined to a small, horizontal, disconnected existence. Through Him, she was healed and restored, and throughout the Gospels we see evidence of Jesus healing in the same manner. He reaches out to people who are trapped in this kind of horizontal, disconnected existence. He takes them by the hand, lifts them up, and even raises them to new life. You may remember Jesus taking a dead girl by the hand and saying to her, "*arise,*" and immediately she "*arose, and walked*" (Mark 5:41-42). Jesus took the hand of a boy who people said was dead, "*and lifted him up; and he arose*" (Mark 9:27). Jesus said to a paralyzed man, "*Arise, take up thy bed, and walk... And immediately he arose...*" (Mark 2:9-12).

In every biblical example, whether it's a fever, paralysis, or even death, Jesus reaches out to the suffering, to the disconnected, to those who are confined to a horizontal existence. He takes them by the hand, lifts them up, and raises them to new life in Him. This is what He did in the first century, and when we consider the Truth that "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever*" (Hebrews 13:8), then we must conclude that this is what Jesus desires to do for us today.

I'm sure you've noticed that the world is running a fever. This year started out with devastating wildfires in Australia that burned more than 47 million acres and that researchers believe killed more than 500 million animals. This year we saw the House of Representatives bring articles of impeachment against the President. So far this year, the new coronavirus has caused the deaths of over 800,000 people. On May 25 of this year, George Floyd was killed, and since that time we've seen peaceful protests turn into violent riots, riots that have left even more people lying dead in the street.

The world is running a fever, and it's not the kind of bodily fever that's caused by the coronavirus. The world is running a fever in its soul that's caused by people who have embraced a small, horizontal, disconnected existence. Like Peter's mother-in-law, whose illness had severed her connection to the abundant, joyful fellowship of friends and family, this fever infecting the soul of the world, and especially our nation, is disconnecting people from abundant, joyful, Divine fellowship with God. The world is flat

on its back, and as its temperature continues to rise, it appears more and more people are choosing to turn inward, to just lay there and embrace this fever, and in doing so, they're choosing to live a life apart from God that is small and flat, a life as limited and finite as themselves.

When we think of Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed, sick and suffering and living a small, horizontal life because this great fever has taken hold of her, we should also think of the great fever that has taken hold of this world; and when we think of those who were gathered around Peter's mother-in-law on that day, those who asked Jesus to help her, we should think of ourselves, because their example is written for us. The people who asked for Jesus' help did so because they, like us, were the ones who knew Him. They knew that He could heal, restore, and even raise her to new life, and in the same way that they asked Jesus to heal her, we need to be asking Him to heal the world.

This passage is evidence of the power and the importance of intercessory prayer, because we see that when those who loved Peter's mother-in-law asked Jesus to help her, He did. He *"took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her..."* (Mark 1:31). They couldn't heal her, so they asked the Great Physician to heal her. History has shown that we can't heal the world, so we need to ask the One who gave His life to heal the world.

There is a great divide of time and culture that separates us from these biblical events, and at times that can make some sayings hard to understand, but the passage we considered today is one that we can all relate to. Like Peter's mother-in-law, the world is running a fever. So many people are choosing to live a life that is small and flat, a life disconnected from God. Many of us can probably remember living that way ourselves, and exactly what it was like to experience a moment, or series of moments, in which Jesus took you by the hand and lifted you up, and the fever left you. Our Lord broke the fever of sin and death and separation from God that had taken hold of us, and now, as those who live in intimate communion with Him, we ask God Almighty, Father, Son, and Spirit to take this world by the hand and lift it up for our good and His glory. Lord, hear our prayer.