

TEXT: Mark 1:29-39

THEME: JESUS CARES

1. With powerful actions
2. With even more powerful words

DATE: Sunday, February 5, 2012 - Epiphany 5

Dearly loved of the Lord Jesus for whom he came:

When people tell you that they care about you or when you tell others that you care about them, just what does that mean? In what way is that supposed to make anyone feel better or actually get better? Will the fact that someone else has their gut in knots for me while I'm suffering from a debilitating illness matter? Is that going to make me feel better? If so, what kind of a person does that make me? Do I need others to be concerned about me so that I can feel better? Does my health and wellness depend on the way others may or may not feel about me? Just what does it mean to care about someone?

Care, is just an outcropping or a fruit of love, isn't it? And like love, can you really care about someone with only words? Aren't actions also necessary? And yet, *when you care enough to send the very best*, will a Hallmark card really change anything? If you truly care about someone, don't you have to put that into some kind of effort? If you care about a sick loved one, won't you put that care into action by actually providing care for them?

Can you begin to see the human dilemma regarding our desires to care about others. We may truly feel a love for them in our hearts, we may have an intense desire to provide health and healing for them and we may wish we could speak a word or wave a wand and remove all the anxiety, disease and tragedy from their lives, but we can't. We can't show the kind of care we want to. Often our care is left effortless and empty. And that's why Jesus matters. Like no one who has ever lived, JESUS CARES!

(READ v. 29-34) Peter and his relatives cared. But for all their caring they were not able to do anything for his mother-in-law. Their love and care couldn't cure the sickness or take away the fever. However, they were certain, from what they had heard and seen, that Jesus also cared. St. Mark does not record anything Jesus said, but it's not what he said so much as what he did. Jesus did what no doctors then or now could do. He touched Peter's mother-in-law. He offered her his hand lifted her up and instantly she was healed and began to serve them.

The townspeople heard that Jesus was at Peter's house and they fearlessly came to the door to see Jesus, because, although they didn't know much, they trusted that Jesus cared and he did. And neither those townspeople nor their sick and demon-possessed were disappointed. Jesus healed them all well into the night. He cast out their demons and forbid them to speak about him even they knew better than the people who he was.

This simple fact shows us how much more and how deeply Jesus really did care for those who had been suffering under the ravages of sin in their bodies. Jesus didn't need or want demons preaching for him. Their words, even truthful words, would never work to convince anyone of his identity. God was not about to strike an alliance with his arch enemy to accomplish his will.

Although it was necessary for their salvation that the people knew and trusted that Jesus was their God come in human flesh to save them, this truth was only effective when carried on the wings of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, only Jesus and those he called would speak for God. His power over all their diseases and even over the demons was sufficient proof that Jesus cared for them and that his message was true.

Jesus is still with us who live and worship in his name even though we often forget that truth. We sometimes think like Mary and Martha, that if Jesus were really present with us, then our loved ones wouldn't die and our friends would find healing for all their illnesses. If only, huh?

Well he is. Jesus is still present with his people, even though you may not be able to see him, and he is present with us because he still cares about us. And because he cares about us, he helps us in our weaknesses and sicknesses. From the tiniest babies to the oldest adults, illnesses are healed and cures for their diseases are discovered. Who do you think is behind those powerful life-preserving techniques and discoveries, Pfizer, Merck, Astra-Zeneca or the naturalists? No, it's your blessed Lord Jesus; he's the one who still heals and cures your diseases. Trust him, because like no one else can, JESUS CARES WITH POWERFUL ACTIONS.

(READ v. 35-39) For what do you suppose Jesus left so early in the morning to pray? Power and strength to face the challenges of another day in Galilee? I'm sure he did. But knowing what you know about the heart of your Savior, what do you think was on his mind and heart even more than that? Don't you think that he would have prayed first of all for these people to whom he had ministered and for the ones he was going to minister to shortly thereafter? I'm certain of that too. And what do you suppose he asked for? Don't you suspect that he asked for the Father to send the Spirit so that

through his preaching and teaching his chosen people might believe what his miracles were saying about him, namely that he was God-in-the-flesh, Immanuel, come to save them from the sickness and death of sin? I don't doubt it.

Are you aware that the Savior also offered such petitions for you on Maundy Thursday? St. John recorded them in the seventeenth chapter of his Gospel. His prayer for you, like any believer's prayer, was powerful and effective. It was heard by the Father and since his requests were perfectly aligned with God's will, they were answered. When you pause to think about it, wouldn't such a word from Jesus be more powerful than even his power to heal your body? Perhaps I should put it this way? Which is the greater gift, the gift of physical healing and health, or the gift of the Holy Spirit and faith?

And since faith is the greater gift, how does faith come? Through what means does God's Spirit work to ignite the flame of faith in the believer's heart? It's the Word, isn't it, specifically the gospel or good news Word of Jesus? So consider again what Jesus told Peter and the others when they finally found him: *Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.* You see, JESUS CARED and not only WITH POWERFUL ACTIONS, but WITH HIS EVEN MORE POWERFUL WORD.

Jesus came to preach, so that through the Word, as he always has and always will, the Spirit would convert the hearts of the people to faith and make unwilling hearts willing, dead hearts alive, condemned hearts justified. Jesus' deep care for the people's spiritual and eternal condition was expressed and remedied by his even more powerful Word.

How does the Word come to have such power? Because Jesus' gospel words were formed in the heart of God, empowered by the breath of the Spirit, and winged to human hearts. Please understand that Jesus' care and concern for you is inseparably linked to his Word which proclaims his person and natures, his life, his suffering and death and his resurrection and ascension to glory.

Should you doubt his care, return to his Word. Recall what it proclaims to you. For your lack of holiness, Jesus cared enough to be your righteousness. For your innumerable sins, Jesus cared enough to be your sin for you, and to suffer all manner of human indignity and torture as well as the eternal punishment of God to redeem you and remove those sins forever from you. For your certain death, Jesus also died and rose to life again, to guarantee your resurrection and to give you the hope of eternal life. To change your uncertainty to fearless faith and hope, Jesus ascended to heaven to stand there before God always interceding for you with his holiness and his nail scarred hands.

And so, Jesus has brought God's care to life and to action and Jesus keeps it this way. JESUS really DOES CARE for you WITH HIS EVEN MORE POWERFUL WORD as it comes to you both spoken and written, and as it is joined to the elements of water in baptism and to bread and wine in Lord's Supper. Through these Words he saves both body and soul from sin and death and opens for you the gates to eternal life and glory.

The message of this account is that JESUS CARES. Yet as we learn from the whole of Scripture, so do those who are connected by faith to Jesus. You Christians care for others and for each other in ways that no other human beings can. You may not be able to do miracles, or write prescriptions, mix drugs, or perform surgeries, but you can and do pray for them, you sit at their bedsides, hold their hands, and speak the Word of God to them. And that kind of care is Jesus' care and Jesus' care heals for good. His care provides the peace of God. And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.