

**Mark 1:29-39** - "This is Why Jesus Came"

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Did you notice any connection between the OT and Gospel readings? In the OT reading from Isaiah God is described as the one who is in authority over all creation, who "*does not faint or grow weary,*" and who's "*understanding is unsearchable.*" In comparison to God we are like "*grasshoppers,*" or like the annoying elm beetles this time of the year. This can be a sobering thought, especially when you consider how annoyingly sinful we are, and how much God hates sin. But then we read that this same all-knowing and almighty God "*gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength*" so that "*they shall mount up with wings like eagles.*" This almighty God, who fills the universe, loves us small, weak, weary, and often annoying sinners, and does all in His power to raise us up—to save us.

This is also what we learn about God in our Gospel reading. Jesus' authority and strength as almighty God is demonstrated in His power over all diseases and demons, while at the same time we see His love and mercy as He heals sinners who are weak and plagued with sickness. Jesus is even concerned with something as minor as the common fever of Simon's mother-in-law. Nothing is too big or too small for our almighty and loving God to deal with.

Having said that, this is a message which can be easily misunderstood. It's misunderstood by those who believe and teach that the more you trust in Jesus the healthier and wealthier you will be. If you're not in good health (like many in our school this past week), or if you don't have great wealth, then some teach that you simply need to trust in Jesus more, and be more faithful in your Christian service. The more faithful you are the healthier and wealthier you will be.

Such a misunderstanding of God's Word is common even in many parts of the Christian church today. It's an easy mistake to make, since Jesus certainly did come to deliver us from sin and all its effects, and to make us rich. But He is speaking of true riches that last forever, not necessarily the things of this world which are here today and gone tomorrow. So, if you're looking for a Jesus who is more concerned about your temporal needs than your eternal needs, then you're looking for the wrong Jesus. He is concerned about all our needs, but especially our eternal needs.

What do you suppose Jesus was praying for in our Gospel reading, people's temporary needs or their eternal needs? Temporal things are of little comfort without the assurance of God's eternal blessings. But why do you suppose most of the people in our text were looking for Jesus? Most likely the majority of them were searching for Jesus to be healed of their temporary troubles in this world, and were missing the main point of Jesus' healing miracles.

Jesus' main purpose for healing people was to point to His divine nature as God, who can heal us of our greatest illness, sin, which leads us to eternal death. Jesus came to set us free from our sins and death through His death and resurrection, and to let us know of His power to do this through His miracles together with His preaching and teaching.

The same is true today. The most important work of our resurrected Lord today is not delivering us from our temporary earthly troubles, which He will eventually do on the Last Day. But before that day, the most important work of our Lord happens right here through His Word and Sacraments, where He creates and sustains in us all the benefits He earned for us on the cross, namely deliverance in both body and soul from our sins, death and the devil, and gives us faith in this Good News. These are the things which no amount of earthly power or wealth can give us, only God through His Word and Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Why is He willing to do so much for us when we have been so unfaithful to Him in the past? Because He loves us. A week from this Wednesday is St. Valentine's day, during which the most prominent symbol for love is a ♥. In fact, it's such a well know symbol for love that all you have to do is write "I ♥ you," and people automatically read, "I love you."

What would you think about sending a Valentine Card to someone which said "I ✝ you." What does this mean? While a ✝ is a Roman instrument of suffering and death, for the Christian it's a reminder of God's love for all people. It reminds us that even though God would be perfectly justified in condemning each one of us because of our sins, He instead became a man in Jesus Christ so that He could suffer the condemning effect of our sins in our place. Through Jesus' death our just and merciful God punished our sins and set us free from our sins at the same time, thus making it possible for Him to forgive our sins through our repentance and faith in Him, and to give us His resurrection victory and eternal life. *"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). "I ✝ you."

Whenever you're going through difficult times and need some encourage-ment to keep you going, the crucifix is a good place to go. It reminds us of God's sacrificial love—what He was willing to go through to save us. And the empty cross reminds us not only of Jesus' resurrection victory over sin, death, and the devil, but also that He is alive and with us today to carry us through all our troubles and eventually to our eternal life in paradise with Him.

Why are we not in paradise yet? Let me explain it this way. God could take us to our heavenly home with Him as soon as He gives us faith in Him, thus ending all our suffering in this world. The fact that He hasn't means that He still has a plan for us in this world. Jesus' presence with us and in us makes us like Him in the sense that we are now children of God in this world whose main purpose is to make sacrifices in our lives in order to let other people know the way of salvation through Jesus Christ.

I thank the Lord for the sacrifices that so many of you have made, during good times and bad, to bring us to this day on which we will be breaking ground for a Christian School building where God's Word will be taught in it's truth and purity. There is no greater gift we can give our children, in the midst of their general education, than the good news about our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the eternal blessings He is here to give us.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.