

Epiphany 5B 07 February 2021
Mark 1:29-39
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
Greg Bensted

Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. *As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.* Let's pray:

Picture Simon's mother-in-law in bed with a fever, flat on her back. No energy. No enthusiasm. Separated from family, friends, and her daily routine. She's alive but not really living. Her world is as small and flat as her bed. She is living an horizontal existence.

You can imagine it. I'm sure you've all had a fever. Today, however, I'm not talking about the kind of fever that comes with the flu or a cold. I'm not talking about an increased body temperature. I'm talking about the times in our lives when we become disconnected from the vertical axis of our lives. I'm talking about the fever of disconnection. I'm talking about the kind of fever that disconnects us from the divine life of Jesus. It leaves us horizontal and disconnected from the source and origin of life; from love, joy, forgiveness, beauty, justice, mercy, compassion, generosity, wisdom, and all the other divine attributes that sustain our lives, give content to our relationships, and direction and purpose to what we do.

This fever begins as a disconnection from the mystery and depth of God. Its symptoms are our disconnection from life, and each other.

Sometimes it's not easy to identify how this happens. Sometimes it's the circumstances of life and it's not really anyone's fault. Other times it's our fault; choices we've made and things we've done. Sometimes I think we just get tired, lazy, or too busy. And remember, the Accuser is busy with his temptations and assaults on our conscience.

Think about the times in your life when you were so tired, so busy, so preoccupied, so overwhelmed, or so whatever, that you just skimmed the surface of life and there was no depth or dimension to your being. Everything felt, looked, and sounded shallow. Those are the times we're disconnected from the vertical axis of our life. Fever has overtaken us and there's only the horizontal.

Most evenings I watch the news and can't help but wonder if we're standing at the edge of a flat world, disconnected from something greater than ourselves. War atrocities, the poor, the hungry, the homeless, battered women, abused children, refugees, those denied education or healthcare are just some of the marks on the world's thermometer, and the temperature is rising. The pandemic fevers of power, greed, hatred, prejudice, injustice, and violence are raging and human beings are dying. The only fever worse than these is the fever of apathy and indifference, to be so disconnected from the vertical axis of God's life that we don't care about the lives of others.

When you have been feverish - times when you felt disconnected, flattened, and confined to a horizontal existence? The fevers of our lives and world are many and varied. Regardless of how it comes about, the fever of disconnection kills; sometimes physically, sometimes emotionally, always spiritually.

That's why it's so important to reflect honestly and deeply on our spiritual lives and recognise the symptoms. Last week I encouraged you to make this an "intentional spiritual practice." Because every time we make a confession, privately or corporately, and we name the things we've done and left undone, and the ways we've not loved God with our whole heart and our neighbour as ourselves, we're diagnosing the fever of disconnection and looking for the antidote.

The antidote for this fever is to reconnect with the vertical axis of our lives; Christ. Christ is both our vertical connection and the means by which that connection is restored and sustained. He breaks the fever. He provides and is the cure. Isn't that what today's gospel is about? Isn't that what's being demonstrated with Simon's mother-in-law?

Jesus “took her by the hand and lifted her up.” She stood upright. Jesus broke her fever and restored her vertical connection. With that restoration all the other connections of her life were renewed. She was returned to her family and community, and “she began to serve them,” not as an act of submission but as evidence of life and as an offering of hospitality and gratitude.

That Jesus “lifted her up” is about more than just changing positions. It’s more than just getting out of bed. This woman has been healed, made whole, and raised to new life. St Mark uses the same Greek root word in other stories of healing and new life (ἐγείρω – to raise up) that’s translated in today’s gospel as “lifted her up”:

- At Jesus’ command a paralytic man “stood up,” took his mat, and walked (Mark 2:9-12).
- Jesus took the hand of a dead girl and told her to “get up,” and she did; she “got up and began to walk about” (Mark 5:41-42).
- Jesus took the hand of a boy most people said was dead and “lifted him up” and he was able to stand (Mark 9:27).
- When the women got to Jesus’ tomb the angel told them, “He has been raised” (Mark 16:6).

In every one of these stories the vertical connection was restored and life was returned. Look at this icon of the resurrection and you’ll see the same thing.



Here, Jesus is taking Adam and Eve by the wrist and lifting them up from the grave, out of death and darkness. They're no longer confined to a purely horizontal existence. Jesus has restored their vertical connection just as he did for Simon's mother-in-law, and just as he does for us.

He gives us a hand in our daily struggles to stand upright and maintain the vertical connection. Christ's hand touches our lives, breaks the fever, restores the connection, lifts us up, and raises us to new life. I know this to be true. I continue to feel the hand of Jesus lifting me to new life and breaking the fever of death.

Christ's hand of resurrection breaks the fever of death. Christ's hand of forgiveness breaks the fever of guilt. Christ's hand of mercy breaks the fever of condemnation. Christ's hand of peace breaks the fever of conflict and violence. Christ's hand of consolation breaks the fever of sorrow and grief. Christ's hand of hope breaks the fever of despair. There is no fever the hand of Christ can't or won't break. Christ breaks every fever. In him every broken connection is restored, every flat life is lifted up, and every horizontal existence is raised to new life.

"Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told [Jesus] about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her." "The fever left her," and the fever will leave you. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

* Icon of the Resurrection depicting Christ having destroyed the gates of Hades and removing Adam and Eve from the grave. Christ is flanked by saints, and Satan is depicted as an old man bound and chained. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Resurrection_\(24\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Resurrection_(24).jpg) accessed 01/02/2021.
