

No Matter Where You Go, Jesus is There
5th Sunday after the Epiphany
February 7, 2021
8 am, 9.15 am, 5 pm
St. David's Episcopal Church

The Rev. Emily Zimbrick-Rogers

Today marks a turning point like so many we've experienced in the pandemic—a new paradigm but maybe not a new normal. After 8 weeks of worshipping only via the livestream, we are opening up again for in-person worship. Some people are able to return to the physical in-person worship, while the majority of St. David's parishioners are still worshipping from home via the livestream. We are the Body of Christ whether gathered in-person or virtually.

For some, this is a moment of joy being back in person in this beautiful and sacred space; for others, there is sadness or a feeling of exclusion for those unable to return in-person and physically be together and receive communion. For others, very little has changed and it's just another Sunday like the past 11 months.

Our Gospel today has a word for each of us, a hope for you whichever group you might find yourself in—those who find themselves in church or at home, because Jesus meets us no matter where we are.

There's a truism you may have heard in counseling or a mindfulness class or on one of those inspirational posters in doctors' offices. *No matter where you go, there you are.*

We can't escape ourselves and right now it's hard to escape our situations. For many people, February seems endless and depressing. For others, being at home has been a peaceful haven. But no matter where you are, Jesus shows up with healing, restoration, and salvation.

Our Gospel passages starts in the middle of a story, the first half we heard last week about Jesus' first healing in the Gospel of Mark—freeing a man from a demon-possession in the synagogue. Our passage today starts “as soon as they were leaving the synagogue,” they went into Simon Peter and Andrew's house. The man suffering from a demon was definitely in need of healing, but he was well enough to be able to make it into the synagogue. And Jesus healed him in this very public, communal place. The house, on the other hand, is a private place, and the person in need of healing, Simon Peter's mother-in-law, is so ill she's in bed, unable to seek out Jesus in the synagogue.

Neither the synagogue nor the house is closed from Jesus' healing. Jesus is willing, ready, and able to heal her too. I know many of us are thinking a lot about fevers right now—and those with children attending in-person schools have to confirm children are fever-free to go to school. Likely, if you've been to a doctor's office recently, someone is at the door taking your temperature. Fevers then and fevers now can be deadly illness. And fevers can be more than physical but psychological, emotional, spiritual, communal, or national illness. These can be

deadly too. And this fever that has constricted this middle-aged or older woman to her bed is as debilitating as the demon. She was probably a widow without an adult son, since she's living with her daughter and son-in-law and she is cut off from her normal life.

Likely her family is worried not just for her but for themselves because of how contagious illness can be. Many people today are fearful to share they have covid and are wondering how to isolate without telling family, co-workers, or friends. Or maybe you're afraid to share about your job loss, marriage trouble, or depression. Both in Jesus' day and today, often times we think of health as a sign of blessing and infection as a sign of sin.¹

Yet Jesus takes this fever-struck woman by the hand—reaches out and gives her this kind human touch—and the fever flees. Jesus raises her up—and this is the language we will hear later about the resurrection of Jesus—this first raising up from the brink of death is just the first of many Jesus will perform.

In fact, the similarities between this woman and Jesus are profound. When she is raised up, she begins to serve. Service is a key theme in Mark and one of the main identifiers of Jesus' messianic ministry. In Mark, chapter 10, Jesus tells his disciples that he came not to be served but to serve. This woman, who like the

¹ "People who hide COVID," by Saahil Desai, The Atlantic, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2021/01/people-who-hide-covid/617601/>

demon-possessed man, is not named, models what it means to follow Jesus and be a disciple. In the Roman Catholic stations of the cross, one of the stations is Veronica wipes the face of Jesus. In Latin, Veronica means true icon, or true image, because a disciple images back to others the face of Jesus. Perhaps we might call Peter's mother-in-law, Veronica, true image of Jesus. In Mark's Gospel, she is the first human disciple to serve or diakonein—the root word for deacon, or servant of Christ. (The angels in the wilderness serve, or deacon, for Jesus.)

So often in the healing stories, we don't know what happens to people afterwards, like the man a few verses earlier. But here, we see the impact of Jesus' touch and healing presence that transforms not only her physically but leads to restoration in the family and prompts her into ministry. We don't know what this service looked like—perhaps serving food, perhaps making out beds for this wandering prophet and his few disciples, perhaps feeding the needy who appear outside her door. But we do know that it's still the Sabbath and neither Jesus nor his woman are supposed to be working! They are both Sabbath protesters, like the Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray, one of our Episcopal saints, who protested segregated buses, education, and restaurants two decades before Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King.

Jesus' healing power shows in the synagogue in the midst of preaching and proclaiming the good news, and his healing ministry shows up in this sick

bedroom. Whether you're in church in person, or confined to home, Jesus is not constricted by walls or boundaries. He meets us where we are.

And this short little passage reveals Jesus shows up two more places—the door outside this house, the alleyway, the street, the town filled with those who need him, and he cures again. This is like those helping with the feeding at St. John's Norristown—reaching out to all those in the streets and outside the doors. He also is in a scary, deserted dark place at the end of this passage. If you find yourself not in church, not in a home with others where you feel loved and at peace, not in a crowd at the edge of community, but maybe in an experience of utter aloneness, fear, isolation, darkness and desolation—Jesus is there with you too. You are never alone, because no matter where you go, and where you are, Jesus is there. Even into the darkness of death. Because we know that some fevers both then and now do not get banished. But we are never alone, even at the end of life. Christ will carry us through.

I pray this truth reaches you no matter where you find yourself this morning. Jesus transforms in the isolated darkness, in the private homes, in the streets, in the public places, and in the churches. There is no where Jesus does not come to set us free and bring us abundant life. Amen.