

## ***FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY***

***Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-12, 21c; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39***

Are we being drained? Are we failing to see what the point of it all is. Are we losing hope? Is joy harder and harder to find?

Are we finding it harder and harder to remember the goals and the dreams that God has placed in our hearts? Are we feeling attacked on all sides and unable to get our lives together?

In today's Gospel reading we encounter Jesus on the Sabbath, doing many things. He has already, as we heard last week, attended worship at the Synagogue and there, during worship, cast an unclean spirit out of a man and healing him. Then He went with his disciples to Peter and Andrew's home, and there He brought healing to Peter's mother-in-law. Later, in the evening, a huge crowd gathered at the door and Jesus healed many of the sick, many who were possessed with evil spirits. It was a very full and very busy day.

The next morning, very early in the morning, while it was still dark, we are told that Jesus got up, left the house and went to a solitary place, a quiet place, where he prayed. He must have been praying for quite a while, because Simon Peter and his companions go looking for Him, and when they find Him, they tell Him that people with needs, people who want healing, people who want his touch, his word, his hope were looking for Him back in Capernaum,. The passage concludes with Jesus telling his disciples, "Let us go to the nearby villages so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." And so He does.

He travels through Galilee, preaching, healing and driving out demons, spreading by word and deed, the good news of God's Kingdom, that God is near at hand, that God is coming to deliver His people, that God is forgiving, that God will raise up all who wait upon Him, that God will give strength to those who turn to Him; that God loves all people and wants everyone to draw near to Him, everyone to repent and to believe in Him, everyone to trust, to know, and to follow Him so that He may shower them with the blessings that last forever, so that they may have peace in their hearts and live in peace with one another and with God. As we read the Gospel accounts, especially in Mark's Gospel, we see Jesus going away from the crowds, to be alone, to pray, to talk with God, for a time of quiet, to reconnect with the Father.

What about us gathered here today? Do we remember why we are here in the first place? Do we recall the simplicity of what God wants of us? Do we recall the glory of what God has promised us? Do we recall how God has helped us in the past?

Do we remember where there is fuel for our tanks, food for our journey, supplies for our task, recovery for our soul, hope for hearts, and direction for our days? Do we turn aside from the hustle and bustle, the fret and the worry of every day life, and allow God to dwell within us, to fill us, to restore us, to guide us, so that we can do with those days what God wants us to do, so that we can be what God wants us to be, what God has made us to be?

The message of God for us today in the prophet Isaiah is precisely this. It is a call to a people who are living in exile to take heart. It is a call to them to remember who God is, and how God has helped them in the past. It is a call to them to come to God so that everything can be put into perspective. It is a call to

them to wait upon God, to listen to God, as well as to speak to God, so God can raise them up, so God can restore them to health, so God can unfold His plan for them, a plan in which their freedom is to be restored, their nation rebuilt, and their cup of suffering replaced with the cup of eternal joy.

The Prophet Isaiah reminds us that God knows each one of us by name. Isaiah says, “Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God’? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and His understanding no one can fathom. Remember what God has done, who God is, what God's purpose is. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Why did Jesus go to the synagogue on the Sabbath Day, week in and week out? Why did He worship at the temple with God's people as well as keep the Law of God? Why did He continually turn aside during His busy days of doing God's work, of preaching, and go to a quiet place and pray? Why did He withdraw from His disciples, and from the crowds, to go up on the mountainsides, or into garden groves to wait upon God?

Might it be so bold as to suggest that He did this because that is what helped Him keep on track? Might it be so bold as to suggest that He did this because that is what gave Him strength?

Might it be so bold as to suggest that He did this because without doing it, He would not have been able to do all he did? We should never forget that God has a purpose for us. God will

redeem us. God will raise us up. And when we hope in that, when we feed ourselves with God's word, when we allow God to speak to us instead of us just talking at him all the time, when we take time aside to be holy, God moves in us to do what we cannot do on our own. God moves in us to give us the strength and the peace that lasts.

Recall the first verse and chorus of Psalm 91 and think of what it says. "You who dwell in the shelter of our God, who abide in this shadow for life; say to the Lord, "my refuge, my Rock in whom I trust" And I will raise you up on eagle's wings, bear you on the breath of dawn, make you to shine like the sun, and hold you in the palm of my hand."

Praise be to God who raises us up. May His Word, His Gospel, His promises, His direction be heard by all of us, be loved by all of us, be clung to by all of us, every day of our lives.

**AMEN.**