

February 4, 2024  
The Fifth Sunday in Epiphany  
St. Stephen's, Catlett; St. Andrew's, Ada  
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Isaiah 40:21-31  
Psalm 147:1-12, 21c  
1 Corinthians 9:16-23  
Mark 1: 29-39

Word does get around, doesn't it? Jesus does one quick, easy healing and before you know it, the entire town of Capernaum shows up at the house of Simon's mother-in-law wanting the same thing. The next morning, it sounds like even more people were searching for Him. He had to get out of town as quickly and quietly as He could because, as He said, He had stuff to do. Now I wonder: why is it, do you think, that Jesus never had to heal any of His immediate disciples? You never hear of John or James having a fever or a broken leg. You never hear of Simon or Jude catching leprosy or Andrew going blind. He's always healing perfect strangers, but never the people closest to Him. That makes me think that the people closest to Him had the least need for healing; they "lived and moved and had their being" in the presence of God; at least they did until Jesus got Himself arrested, and they scattered like cockroaches. Like Jesus, they had stuff to do. Following Him and staying with Him – John would call it abiding with Him – laid certain obligations on them, even if they didn't always (or ever?) understand what they were supposed to be doing.

Paul tells the Corinthians that just like the other Apostles, he too has had an obligation laid on him, and he says, "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16). Unlike the other Apostles, Paul was very clear about what he had to do, and he certainly did it passionately right up until they threw him in prison for the last time and cut off his head. He never faltered, never ran, never sought to do anything but the work God had given him to do. And it's not like Paul never suffered. Like the crowds that constantly pressed on Jesus from every side, Paul wanted a favor, although just one. In his second letter to the Corinthians he describes what he called a "thorn in the flesh;" he kept asking God to get rid of it. God's answer was always the same: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Like Paul and the other Apostles, we too had an obligation laid on us, at Baptism. The question is whether we are more like the crowds, always pressing on Jesus to do this or that, or like the Apostles, in whose weakness God's power is made perfect. The crowds wanted their instant healing, their immediate recovery, their sudden and dramatic miracle. The Apostles, even Paul, were content to wait, even when waiting suggested that they would not see the kind of healing they were looking for in this life. That was fine with them.

But is it fine for us? I suspect that most of us have spent quite a bit of time in both camps: we have been with the crowds wanting favors as well as with the disciples who were content with waiting. I would think that most of us by now have learned to gravitate more toward the disciples. I would think that most of us are taking our cue from the author of Psalm 147, who says that "the Lord has pleasure in those who await His gracious favor" (vs. 12). Likewise, Isaiah tells us that "Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength" (40:31). Our bodies may cry out with weakness, but when we refuse to become part of the clamoring crowds chasing Jesus all over creation, when we seek only to live in His presence and wait for his power to be made perfect our weakness, we shall "run and not be weary; we shall walk and not faint" (40:31).

Our readings today ask us to consider whether we're among the throngs pressing on Jesus wanting miracles, or whether we're among those who are content simply to be in the presence of God and wait for God's timing. God's power, after all, is made perfect in our relentless weakness.