



**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School**

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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**Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany**

**February 4, 2018**

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**“An Inconsequential life?”**

*(Mark 1:29-31)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“Immediately [Jesus] left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon’s mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them” (Mark 1:29-31).*

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...  
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

**Collect:** O Lord, keep Your family the Church continually in the true faith that, relying on the hope of Your heavenly grace, we may ever be defended by Your mighty power; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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Do you ever feel as if you really haven't made much of an impact on the world? At one time, each of us had high hopes that we would. But we've been out there for some time now, doing our thing at work and in the community and the impact we have is negligible. We've been throwing our little pebbles out into the pond and the ripples are pretty mild, pretty faint and don't seem to travel very far. My name isn't on any bridge, is yours? No one ever asks for my signature, unless I'm buying something, or assuring them that I've read and agree to the terms of agreement. (I never read those things.) Sometimes we may get it into our heads that we're pretty important (at least in our own little circles) but the truth of the matter is others think about you and me far less than we think they think about you and me, and there are times when that becomes painfully obvious. And besides, no one is indispensable. There are about 7 billion other people out there; surely someone can be found to take your place and mine. We desperately want to leave a mark on the world, but the world is a pretty big and hard place. Maybe that's why some leave their marks on bathroom stalls instead. It's easier.

I wonder if Simon's mother-in-law ever felt as if her life was inconsequential. We don't know anything about her. History has even forgotten her name. Scripture records no words of hers . . . no heroic acts of faith. All we know is she's Simon's mother-in-law and Simon and his brother Andrew seem to be taking care of her and that she got sick and Jesus made her well.

Let's put it into context. It's the Sabbath. Earlier in the day Jesus had been teaching in that synagogue of Capernaum and had a frightening encounter with a man possessed by an unclean spirit. (That was last week's Gospel

lesson.) There was screaming. There was convulsing. And there was the strong, authoritative Word of Jesus: “Come out of him!” And when the Lord speaks like that, not even demons can resist him.

The synagogue service is now over and so they go to Simon’s home in Capernaum to sit down for the main Sabbath meal. Peter’s mother-in-law is in bed sick. This doesn’t seem to be a life-threatening illness. Mark usually lets us know if a person is dying; but here he simply says she’s sick with a fever. So it doesn’t seem serious; just the usual sniffing, sneezing, aching, coughing, stuffy-head sort of illness that Wisconsinites are particularly good at. It’s the kind of illness that gives you the chills and makes you want to take a hot bath and then crawl into bed and go to sleep for about a week . . . but it’s not serious.

Jesus goes into her bedroom to check on her, a friendly gesture we think, but in that day, it is no place for a man to be. Besides, it’s just a fever, for Pete’s sake (or for Peter’s mother-in-law’s sake). It’s not leprosy or paralysis or demon-possession. Still, Jesus doesn’t hesitate. He assumes the freedom of the house, and goes to her bedside. He stoops and takes her by the hand and gently helps her up out of bed. As he does this, the fever leaves her.

Her response to the little miracle gives another clue that it wasn’t that serious. She doesn’t jump for joy or fall on her knees in praise. She doesn’t sing a Te Deum, or shout “Hosanna!” No she goes straight to the kitchen and starts helping out. Peter’s mother-in-law does what my mother-in-law always does, as if pulled by some strange gravitational force to the sink of dirty dishes or to the laundry that needs folding. It was the next thing for her to do.

It’s a quiet miracle, unassuming, easily forgotten, especially when compared to the rest of the day. It’s a quiet miracle sandwiched between the high drama that took place in the synagogue earlier that morning, and the memorable scene that would take place later that day, after sundown marked Sabbath’s end, when the whole town showed up at Peter’s house, carrying their burdens, their sick babies, their

hobbling grandparents, their crippled and lame. But this middle of the day miracle is a quiet miracle. In the morning, Jesus was dealing with a screaming demon, but this is about a runny nose and a sore throat. In the morning the miracle was very public; this was private. In the morning, it was all so dramatic, with loud cries and authoritative commands and convulsions and an astonished crowd; but this one has a domestic simplicity to it. No words, no convulsions, just a gentle hand assisting an old woman out of bed. It's almost boring. Chances are good she would have felt better in a few days without the miracle, so it really only served as a short cut to health and strength.

I poked around a bit and sure enough, I didn't find any great works of art done on this miracle. Apparently it just didn't score high enough on the drama scale.

So the question is why? Why was it recorded in the first place? Why did Mark bother? It wasn't a big deal . . . unless . . . unless you happen to be Peter's mother-in-law. I suspect she would never be the same, not so much because the fever left her, but because Jesus cared enough to take the fever away from her. From that day on, she knew something about Jesus and God's love that she probably didn't before, that even she was important to him, not just her son-in-law, Peter, who would one day become a central leader of the early church, but also she, whose name no one managed to remember. She too was important to Jesus.

She, the old mother-in-law, always feeling like a burden, like she's in the way, past prime and easily confused; she, with her bothersome sneezing and incessant coughing and her frequent trips to the potty during the night; she with her achy knees and knuckles that predict the weather; she whose needs and limitations always need to be accounted for when making household plans; she who needs more service than she can render; she who feels like she's just marking time until death: She is important to Jesus, precious even. She doesn't doubt that anymore.

Maybe this miracle is for all of us who feel their lives are unimportant, whose names will soon be forgotten by

history. Maybe it's for those who feel we're not having much of an impact on the world. The ripples we're leaving behind are pretty faint. Maybe it's for those who feel we receive more from the world than we're able to give.

But this little miracle teaches us even our puny cares matter to him and are important enough to him. If a common fever is not too small a thing to concern him, then a lot of things are fair game. If Jesus was willing to step into the darkened sick room of Peter's house, then maybe he's also willing to step into your family room darkened by yet another quarrel, or your kitchen darkened by the cares and worries of the day, or your bedroom darkened by private and quiet tears, or the place where you pay your bills with some anxiety. If he was willing to tend to the fever of Peter's mother-in-law, then maybe he's willing to tend to your small cares too. Why not ask him to?

Peter's mother-in-law would never again doubt she was important to God. I do hope you never doubt that. The one who created and gave names to each of those billions of stars also knows your name. In fact, he cares enough to know how many hairs are on your head, a measure of his love. He didn't die for the sun or moon or stars, at least not like he died for you, for your forgiveness, for your salvation. You may feel insignificant, but you are not, not to him. You may feel your life is inconsequential, but it is not. He still has high expectations of you, and plans for you.

You may feel like you will be easily forgotten, but you won't . . . not by him. Isaiah 49: "Can a woman forget her nursing child? Though she may forget, I will never forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands" (v.15).

Sometimes I think cemeteries full of tombstones with our names engraved into the granite represent our last ditch effort to be remembered, our last ditch effort to leave some kind of mark on the world. But as God's children, we don't need to worry about that, because he has remembered you and has engraved you not into cold, hard granite; but into the palms of his hands.

From my wife, I've learned that when people suffer injuries to their hands, it's a very personal injury. We do everything with our hands, and so we are reminded continuously of the injury . . . by the pain and the disfigurement and the loss of function. A hand injury screams at you throughout the day when you try to button your shirt, type a letter, tie your shoes. You can't even pour a glass of milk without the injury talking to you. So hand injuries have these outsized psychological component to them that hand therapists always have to keep in mind. That God should engrave us into the palms of his hands, and that the hands of Jesus, still today, bear the marks of his crucifixion . . . it means he's never going to forget us. It means we are important to him. It means we are saved by his grace. He doesn't need the reminder, but one glance at his hands will remind him of who we are and what he has done for us.

People move in and out of our lives with startling fluidity; we forget them, and they us. But God doesn't forget his own. Regardless of how much or how little is happening in your life, how great how small the ripples, you are precious to him.

That's the lesson of this quiet, little miracle. That's why Mark jotted it down. Such is God's love in Jesus Christ: no life is too small or inconsequential to him. Amen.



