

Epiphany 5B, 2009

Text: Mark 1:29 – 39

Title: Jesus Comes Home with You

+ INI +

We're now five weeks into Epiphany. In the season of Epiphany, Jesus reveals Himself to us, showing us who is and why He's come. It started in the waters of the Jordan, and the voice of God the Father proclaiming Jesus to be His beloved Son. Then it was Peter confessing that Jesus was the Christ, and Jesus appearing to Paul on the road to Damascus.

Last week it was Jesus' sermon in the synagogue. People were amazed because Jesus talked funny. Jesus spoke with authority, and even the demons listened and obeyed.

That was last week. The setting was the regular Sabbath service at the synagogue. It was a church service, very similar to what we experience every week. They had Scripture readings, prayers, and psalms, many of which we use, too.

This week we pick up the story, later that day.

What do you do after church? What's your Sunday routine? Maybe you'll go home for Sunday dinner, or maybe you go out for brunch or dinner.

For my family, Sunday dinner was always a big deal, usually the best meal of the week. If you live a busy life, this may be the only time to sit down and have a meal together as a family. After church is family time, a time to relax, a time to enjoy each other's company before the busyness of the week ahead.

Today, Peter has Jesus over for Sunday dinner. Peter's brother Andrew is there, of course, and he also asks the Zebedee boys- Jim and John to come over, too. Jesus, we know, was a bachelor, and so He could probably use a good home-cooked meal. "The wife always makes plenty of food, and so why don't you come over and hang out at our place."

And so Jesus comes over and they all pack into Peter's little house. The kids have left some toys lying around, so some last minute straightening up needs to be done to make room for the guests. The kids take off their Sunday clothes and head out to play. The women head to the kitchen to put the finishing touches on dinner, and maybe catch up on the latest gossip. Pete, Andy, and their new friends are happy to let the women work, and let the kids play, and just relax until dinner is ready.

But there's one distraction. Grandma hasn't been feeling too well. She's been fighting a fever for a few days. She couldn't make it church that morning, and she never misses a week. They set up a couch for her off in the corner. She doesn't want to be a bother to the boys and their new friends, so she tries to get some rest and keep as quiet as she can.

But Jesus asks about her. Peter explains, “Well, she’s getting on in years, of course. Her husband’s been gone for quite some time, and she couldn’t take care of the house or live alone any more, so she’s been living with us. She was a big help with the kids when she first moved in, but lately her health hasn’t been the greatest. The fever’s got us all worried; she just doesn’t recover as quickly as she used to.”

So Jesus puts down his drink and goes over to have a look. He doesn’t say anything; He just reaches out his hand, helps her up, and suddenly, she feels fine. In fact, she feels about ten years younger. And so she heads off to the kitchen to see if she can lend a hand.

It’s all very casual. There’s little drama or excitement. Jesus just helps her up and it’s back to work. The table is not going to set itself, you know. Grandma probably feels bad about being in bed for the past few days, and she wants to make herself useful once more.

Today we see Jesus leave the synagogue and come to Peter’s house. Jesus is not only preaching and teaching in church. He’s not only speaking to the multitudes out in the streets. Jesus is not only out there with the disciples on the mountainside.

Jesus comes to Peter’s house. He sits down to visit with him and his family. And where it looks like Jesus can do some good, He helps out Peter’s mother in law.

And it’s the same for us today. Jesus is not only here in church. He’s not just here on Sunday morning. Every Sunday, after church, Jesus goes home with each and every one of you, too. Jesus goes to your house week after week.

You receive Jesus here and you bear Him with you when you leave.

Jesus is with you in the preaching of His words, and in His body and blood. This is how Jesus gets in you and takes up residence in your very body. Wherever you go, Jesus goes with you.

Jesus is with you for the car ride home. He’s there with you at the dinner table on Sunday afternoon. He’s there on the couch next to you as you watch TV. He’s in the garage as you work on the car. He’s in the basement when you’re doing laundry. He’s there as you surf the net or talk to your friends on the phone. He’s there with you every night when you get into bed. Jesus comes home with you.

Now that can be a scary thought. We like to keep Jesus at arm’s length. We’re happy to meet Him here once a week, get dressed up, spend an hour or so with Him, and we think that then we’ve done our part, and we can sleep easy at night. And then we can leave and go back to living our lives how we want and leave Jesus here at church.

But this puts us in charge, in control. If we can keep Jesus here at church, then we don’t have to worry about Him interfering in our everyday lives.

And if there’s a week when we’re tired, or just don’t feel like seeing Jesus, we can sleep in, take a week off, and we don’t have to deal with Jesus for another week.

But that's not really how things work. Whether we like it or not, Jesus comes home with us, too.

The thought of Jesus coming home with us can be scary. Our houses are a mess. Our lives are a mess. We're ashamed of how we spend our time, how we treat one another, even members of our own families.

We may even be comfortable with Jesus in our living room or at the dining table, as long as He doesn't peek in all the closets or under the bed, or check to see what's in the medicine cabinet.

We'd rather keep Jesus at arms' length. Let Him stay here at church. Don't call me, Jesus, I'll call you. I'll be here if there's something I need, or if I can find the time, and we can take care of things here, but don't show up at my door. I need my privacy. I need my own life. I need to be able to unwind and relax without worrying about offending you.

As much as we'd like to keep Jesus at arm's length and under our control, it doesn't quite work that way. He comes home with you to be a part of your everyday life. Having Jesus show up at your house can be a scary thing.

But it is also a wonderful blessing. Jesus is there with you at your house, not to inspect your home and not to ruin all your fun. Jesus is there to share in your joys, to comfort you in your sorrows, and to give the love, forgiveness, and special attention that only He can give. He's there to change your life, for the better.

Consider how Jesus changed the life of Peter's mother-in-law. She would never forget that day. She felt awful. She felt sick. She felt useless. She might have even wondered why God even bothered keeping her around.

But Jesus comes to her and sets her back on her feet. Jesus pays attention to her and lets her know how much he cares for her. She responds by serving him and the rest of her family. Now she feels useful and valuable once more.

There are many folks whom our society says just aren't valuable or useful. The old. The disabled. The poor. The unemployed. But when Jesus touches your life, He transforms you into a valuable, useful person. You are precious to Him, and He will have good use of you.

It may not be anything that dramatic and spectacular. It may not be preaching on the street corners or doing mission work on the other side of the world.

For Peter's mother in law, it was helping to fix a meal for a hungry family. The Lord can use you in ways that seem simple and ordinary, but they mean everything for those in need. It may be as simple as preparing a meal, or giving someone a ride, or helping out around the house. It could even be visiting someone in need, sending a card, or making a phone call.

Often people I visit in nursing homes or in the hospital tell me how useless they feel. They want to be active and serving their neighbors, but their aging bodies just won't let them. They wonder

why they're still around.

One thing I always tell them that they can still do is pray. Even when our body goes and we can no longer fix meals or do work around the house, when we can no longer care for those around us and we have to rely on them to take care of us, we are still called to pray, to intercede for all those in need. And that is the greatest service we give to our neighbors

One day these earthly bodies will wear out. One day the fever or the cancer or the heart disease will win. And we wonder where Jesus is. Why doesn't He come to our house and heal us? Why doesn't he heal our grandmother, our mother, our wife, like he healed Peter's mother in law? Isn't Jesus here? Doesn't Jesus care?

The answer is yes, Jesus is with you. Jesus still cares for you. He cared so much that He took all of your sickness, your weakness, even your sinfulness upon himself and died on the cross in your place, to put an end to all these things.

Even in the midst of sickness, pain, and death, Jesus is there suffering with you. And even if He doesn't heal you today, even if He doesn't raise you or your loved one today, He will raise us all on the last day.

When Jesus returns, He will come to each of us. And even though we lie in our earthen bed, totally helpless in the sleep of death. Jesus will reach out and take us by the hand, he will gently raise us to our feet. Our bodies will be healthy, whole, perfected. No more fever, no more cancer, no more pain. And we will all rejoice to serve Him in His kingdom on that great Sabbath day that never ends.