

“I’ve Got a Fever, and There Is Only One Cure”

Luke 4:31-44

As many of you know, I like to write my sermons on Monday, and be done with them by Tuesday, because you never know how the week will unfold. So my Monday morning ritual is to go through my emails to make sure there is nothing that requires urgency, then I read through the lessons for the coming Sunday. And I always read them out loud. When reading Scripture or the Catechism, I really do encourage you to read out loud. Adding those extra senses to the process makes such a difference in comprehension and retention.

So as I was reading our Old Testament lesson, something there in Jeremiah text caught my attention. Jeremiah’s response to the Lord calling him as a prophet is to say, “I am only a youth.” That made me think. The youth of our church are capable of deep and abiding faith. I thought of our confirmation class. In recent weeks we have had the discussion that they need to step up and start taking more responsibility – in general and in regard to their spiritual life. Their job is to be ready for adulthood which is arriving much faster than they think. And they need to have their, shall I say, “spiritual compass pointing North” because the day is coming very soon when you are off to college or living on your own and mom and dad are not going to be getting you out of bed on time to come to church.

But it is even worse than that. As we tell the kids at our Camp CILCA retreat every year, on average 50% of the kids confirmed in 8th grade will essentially stop coming to church by the end of their 9th grade year. 9th graders are living at home and are not driving. This failure is on the parents. And your Father in heaven is saddened by the reality of being rejected by those whom He loves: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.” And He is rejected by His children who have stood here in His Church and vowed to love Him.

Then I looked at the Epistle lesson and heard those words read at my wedding and many other weddings: “Love is patient and kind . . .” Reading this text, I was reminded of my own wedding vows – which is something I encourage all of you to review now and then. And say them out loud. One of the great parts of being a pastor is that I get to speak my confirmation vows and my wedding vows over and over again. It helps you stay grounded. These vows are strong words.

Then I read about Jesus casting out the demon, as we read in Luke’s Gospel. Talk about strong words. The people in Capernaum were amazed at the authority with which Jesus spoke. This man speaks with strong words, not like the “teachers of the Law.” In trying to decide on what to preach, I also pondered focusing on the house of Peter’s mother-in-law. When we were there, in Capernaum, they have found it. The house had become a church. And you can look down into the rooms and see the actual floor and walls that Jesus and the disciples would have touched. There was so much to preach on.

I settled on Simon Peter’s mother-in-law. With her, Jesus came and “rebuked the fever” and it left her. I have been blessed in my adult life that I have rarely become what I would consider violently ill. When I was a kid, it seemed like every Spring I would miss a couple weeks of school.

It is humbling to be helpless. When you realize that nothing you do will make you better. And you know that certain ills just have to run their course. Or, in the case of more serious ailments, sometimes there is simply nothing left to do but pray for the grace and strength to endure whatever days lie before you. We can try to give our own rebuke and tell God that “I am too busy to be sick this week.” And no amount of self-importance will free you from certain illnesses. And we all have seen how one unexpected diagnosis can change all of our plans.

This is our life of sin. Sin is a plague upon mankind. As St. Paul says, “The wages of sin is death.” Sin is a sickness that leads to death. You are born with it. Even though God knew you from before you were formed in the womb, the sin of Adam was with you when you were born – actually when you were conceived, if we want to be specific. And these days, we certainly need to be specific about when life begins.

This is why sin must be dealt with. This is why children need to be baptized. This is why Christ came into this world, so that He could be the One who dealt with our sin. We certainly do not want to be the one attempting to pay that price. Sin is the worst of all illnesses. It is terminal. It always leads to death.

This seemed to be what was happening to Peter’s mother-in-law. However, Jesus speaks, rebukes the fever, and it “left” her. The word “to leave” is the same Greek word often used and translated as “to forgive.” To be forgiven is to be separated from your sins. Your sins have left you, because Jesus has rebuked them.

And immediately she rose. And yes, this is the same words used at Jesus resurrection. Here in Luke’s Gospel, early in His ministry, we get a foreshadowing of a greater event to come. There is a much worse illness than a fever, and there is only one cure . . . the forgiveness of sin followed

by the resurrection. Sin is the disease. It must be separated from you. It must be forgiven. This is why we baptize. And what a joy it is to hear those words: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.”

Yet, because the sin of Adam makes us, by nature, sinful and unclean, the wages of sin is still death. Sin is not just a deadly disease. It is *the* deadly disease. This is why we gather around the broken body and shed blood of Christ our Lord.

Keeping all of our vows, doing our best to do what is right, being the best that we can be will not “rebuke the fever” of sin. Without Christ, we are helpless. The Law of God pointing out the guilt of our sin is very humbling. And no amount of self-importance will triumph over the fever of sin.

From the time you entered your mother’s womb, you have had this “fever,” and there is only One cure. What a joy it is to know that God has said, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.”

The salvation of God’s elect has never been in doubt. The forgiveness of sin – your sin leaving you, being separated from you as far as the East is from the West, as Scripture says, this is the heart of the Gospel. The forgiveness of sin followed by the resurrection – we get a foreshadowing of that in the house of Peter’s mother-in-law. How fitting that a place of forgiveness and the promise of the resurrection would become a church. Nothing has changed. The church is where we still come to receive forgiveness – have our sin be separated from and leave us. It is here that we find the promise of the resurrection.

Sin is the sickness that leads to death. Christ is the cure. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Amen.