

## **“Healed, Restored and Sent”**

Epiphany 5 2012

Let us pray – “Dear God, help us to listen. Help us listen to those around us who are asking for our help. Then help us to serve them with love.” Amen.

**Image:** This week I found a great new children’s book - *I have a little problem said the Bear*: “I have a little problem,” says the bear to the inventor. “You see, I...” But the inventor doesn’t let the bear finish; he knows exactly what he needs: a pair of wings. The now–worried-looking bear goes from shop to shop, each time getting cut off one word earlier in his explanation, each time getting something he clearly doesn’t need. Finally, draped about and laden with scarf, hat, vitamins, necklace, eyeglasses, honey and boots, he makes his way out of town, sits down on a hill and sighs. When you look at the pictures notice how sad and frustrated he is...why do you think the Bear is frustrated? No body is listening to what he needs. Then comes a fly who finally listens to the bear, it turns out *he* is exactly what the bear needs to solve his problem: a friend to keep him company in his cave. Today in our Bible story Jesus takes time to listen to the needs of his friend Peter. Peter’s mother-in-law was very sick and Jesus listens and restores her to health so she can serve. Jesus took time to listen, made a connection, restored her to the community and sent her to serve. It is amazing what happens when we listen and make a friend.

**Introduction** In our world today we are hard at work trying to make connections. Some of us look forward to the commercials that will be inaugurated today during the Super Bowl; all of them trying in creative ways to outdo the other by making a connection with their product – they are going to extraordinary lengths so that you listen to their commercial. Two weeks ago the synod offered pastors time away to learn about social media opportunities. We listened to a young man Justin Wise talk about the gift of social media and how it can be an asset to our congregations. We were taught how to begin a Face Book Fan Page that will help us draw others to our congregation. It was about getting connected in with technology so that we are connected to others looking to learn more about Jesus. We are going to launch a Fan Page very soon. But think about how we stay connected: email, Internet, I Phones, Face book, Twitter... the list goes on and on. A great analogy is our beautiful web site which is intended to be the brain of our congregation, Blogs the face of leadership in our organization; Face Book and Twitter the voice of your organization; these are ways to interact with others. Justin did say that it is important to remember that meeting another in person trumps all technology.

**Indwelling:** *When Jesus heals us, we are connected to and empowered to serve.* I really like the Gospel for today. All in all, it's been a pretty busy day for Jesus. He's been preaching and teaching astounding people at the Capernaum Synagogue, then he heals a guy possessed by an unclean spirit, and then he retires to the home of Simon Peter for a little relaxation only to find that Simon's mother-in-law is sick. So he heals her and when that word got out, he heals just about everyone else in Capernaum. Yes, it's been a busy day for Jesus, and so he sneaks away for a time of seclusion, prayer, and renewal (and, trust me, if Jesus needs to do that from time to time, you and I probably do, too). While there's a lot going on in this passage and chapter, though, I really want to focus on just one little verse: ***"He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them"*** (1:31b).

Jesus lovingly heals Peter's mother-in-law, it is a tender moment in the Gospel. If only Mark would have given us her name we could stop calling her Peter's mother-in-law; so for a few minutes let's call her Ruth. It says that Jesus took Ruth by the hand and "raised her up." This word for "raised her up" is only used later for Jesus in Mark's Easter story. Sarah Henrich in the web site Working Preacher says, ***"The word suggests that new strength is imparted to those laid low by illness, unclean spirits, or even death, so that they may again rise up to take their place in the world."*** ([Workingpreacher.org](http://Workingpreacher.org), Gospel Commentary February 5, 2012)

The other simple tidbit in this rich lesson is that once she is healed she is able to serve. She is connected to and restored to community with a task. Sarah Henrich said that, ***illness bore a heavy social cost: not only would a person be unable to earn a living or contribute to the well-being of a household, but their ability to take their proper role in the community, to be honored as a valuable member of a household, town, or village, would be taken from them. Peter's mother-in-law is an excellent case in point. It was her calling and her honor to show hospitality to guests in her home. Cut off from that role by an illness cut her off from doing that which integrated her into her world. Who was she when no longer able to engage in her calling? Jesus restored her to her social world and brought her back to a life of value by freeing her from that fever. It is very important to see that healing is about restoration to community and restoration of a calling, a role as well as restoration to life. For life without community and calling is bleak indeed.*** ([Workingpreacher.org](http://Workingpreacher.org), Gospel Commentary February 5, 2012) So Jesus simply healed Ruth, connected and restored her to community and sent her to serve!

**Immediacy:** You know modern technology is amazing. I leaned over to Jerry Tews at the conference and said, "My we have come a long way from the telephone, answering box and mimeograph 30 years ago. Face Book allows me to see my nephew Eric's new love and connects me to a few High School friends that I have not seen for a long time and Face Time connects us with our kids live in Portland later today. When our culture is

becoming increasingly mobile and transient, these tools have allowed many of us—myself included—to sustain relationships with friends and loved ones across great distances in a way that have never been possible before. Surely, these technologies represent an opportunity to connect... even as they also have the potential to distract us from connecting with the world that is right in front of us. I remember reading an article in a magazine in which a young person confessed that she had become “addicted” to the social networking sites and finally had to quit cold turkey. The moment she realized things had gotten out of hand, she said, was when she completely failed to turn up for a party with friends because she was too busy...looking at pictures of a previous party. New technologies offer great possibilities, but they can never diminish the importance of human contact and physical presence.

In that respect, I believe that one of the greatest opportunities we have for connection is right here in this place. We come together, week by week and are invited to connect afresh—with God, with each other, with ourselves, with the whole communion of saints as it stretches across time and space. We connect as we pray [and sing] together, as we pass the peace, as we place our offering in the plate, as we share a holy meal of bread and wine. (After all, what does the word “communion” mean if not “connection”?) And we also connect as we are companions on a Care Team, as we shepherd at Sunday School or guide at confirmation, as we greet someone at the welcome center. Here in this place, as at all other times and places, connection leads to healing, listening and connecting to community.

**Imitation/ In the end:** Oh, it will take a Fan Page to begin the conversation or engage others with quality questions if we are going to be intentional about our outreach in our new web site, deliberate in the quality of communication we use to invite others to this place at this time. Our intent ought to be like Jesus frequently coming into contact with those who were socially isolated in some way, those who like Ruth Peter’s mother-in-law or like the man in the synagogue last week who was disconnected from society. Jesus could have ignored such people, but he never did. Instead, he engaged them, connected with them, challenged them and loved them. And through that connection, time and again, they found healing and were given a task to serve. In the same way, Jesus seeks to connect with each one of us. He engages us, challenges us, loves us, and ultimately calls and empowers us to engage and connect with others—especially those who are most isolated and vulnerable. Who has raised you up this week? Who have you lifted up this week? Take a moment and ask yourself who has re-connected me to community this week? Who have I helped make a connection to Jesus? Can you think of a moment? (Pause) I love the children’s story “I have a little problem says the Bear.” It was the one who finally listens, it turns out the fly is exactly what the bear needs to solve his problem: a friend to keep him company. It puts a whole new spin on the phrase: “Oh to be a fly on the wall of a friend!” Amen.