

## 9.03.23 – Pentecost 14 & Labor Day Weekend

### “Christ’s Authority Cures”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

#### **Psalm 145:14-21 (The Message)**

<sup>14</sup> God gives a hand to those down on their luck,  
gives a fresh start to those ready to quit.

<sup>15</sup> All eyes are on you, expectant;  
you give them their meals on time.

<sup>16</sup> Generous to a fault,  
you lavish your favor on all creatures.

<sup>17</sup> Everything God does is right—  
the trademark on all his works is love.

<sup>18</sup> God’s there, listening for all who pray,  
for all who pray and mean it.

<sup>19</sup> He does what’s best for those who fear him—  
hears them call out, and saves them.

<sup>20</sup> God sticks by all who love him,  
but it’s all over for those who don’t.

<sup>21</sup> My mouth is filled with God’s praise.  
Let everything living bless him,  
bless his holy name from now to eternity!

**Leader: These are Words of Praise for God!** All: Thanks be to God!

#### **Mark 1:29-34 (TLB)**

<sup>29-30</sup> Then, leaving the synagogue, he and his disciples went over to Simon and Andrew’s home, where they found Simon’s mother-in-law sick in bed with a high fever. They told Jesus about her right away. <sup>31</sup> He went to her bedside, and as he took her by the hand and helped her to sit up, the fever suddenly left, and she got up and prepared dinner for them!

<sup>32-33</sup> By sunset the courtyard was filled with the sick and demon-possessed, brought to him for healing; and a huge crowd of people from all over the city of Capernaum gathered outside the door to watch. <sup>34</sup> So Jesus healed great numbers of sick folk that evening and ordered many demons to come out of their victims. (But he refused to allow the demons to speak, because they knew who he was.)

**Leader: These Words of Healing and Faith Are of God!** All: Thanks be to God!

#### **Please pray with me:**

Dear Jesus, we thank you for your healing power and your gift of touch. We ask you to reveal the lessons you intend for us during times of healing and recovery, as we trust your compassion and love. Help us to receive your strength and curative power as you demonstrate it through healing others. Instruct us anew as we learn these healing stories of your grace and mercy. May your voice be the one heard today as you speak through mine. Amen.

As we approach Labor Day tomorrow, it's appropriate that our last healing story takes place on the Sabbath, and it is the only one where Jesus does not get in trouble by the religious leaders for working or healing on the Sabbath. I will point out that the verses that follow our passage show Jesus going off by himself to a solitary place to rest, as many workers will do tomorrow. He set the precedent to take another day for pastors who do work on Sundays.

As we close our five-week series on healing, let me clarify something important. We may fall on our knees in weakness when illness or death looms, and in gratitude when God heals or comforts us; but do not assume all these stories are about victims. Our faith is bigger than just problem solving. Some of these stories had strong people in them: people of faith or some even not of faith yet God healed them through his compassion and grace anyway. The stories show us that we cannot "earn" God's grace or healing through religiosity or moral living, even though we are pressed to keep his commandments. As we interpret God's healing accounts, be careful not to think they do not apply to you. You may be healthy, strong, affluent, or at least comfortable. Let me assure you that you still need Christ's authority to cure whatever ails you: whether it's physical, mental, emotional, psychological, or spiritual.

God's grace through Christ cures also the arrogant, the self-satisfied, and even the spiritual skeptic. We question why churches are shrinking and why people aren't seeking Christ's cure through the church. I do not have all the answers, but I do know from personal experience that our human reliance on self alone is an illness of sorts that desperately needs Christ's curing compassion. We can be **so sure** we have it all

together that we never see a need for Jesus' love, or perceive a need to convert to Christianity, or never feel a desire to join a church or group of believers. That self-reliant ego can be subtle; we can forget our gratitude to Christ's authority through God, and just drift along in life pursuing the world's ambitious career ladder. Yes, skeptics and even believers do this and miss the curative power of grace.

You do not need to be sick or victimized to follow Jesus! That is the most important closing healing message for the church to know and share. The strong follow Jesus **because** of his power, his mercy, and his gift of love. **We must project both a safe place for the ill and needy while also projecting a missional place for the strong and generous.** Consumerism is rampant in the church; many will go down the street for a more entertaining worship experience or a different style because a friend invites them. But those who really seek Jesus are looking for authenticity, life application, people they can relate to, and ways to serve others. How do we convey that available healing and societal cure? Paul, for example, was one of those strong people we would like to attract to United (if you overlook his murderous past): he had earthly wisdom, career success, pride, and good business sense, but he was a slave to all of it. Only Jesus could transform his life; that transformation is what we have to offer others. Remember as we explore today's passages that everyone needs Christ and his authority, even Peter's mother-in-law. Who do you know?

Even King David who had everything needed God. In Psalm 145, he praises the Lord for his mighty acts and providing a kingdom. He praises God's nature and graciousness, compassion, patience, and love as

he teaches the congregation through this poem. God answers the prayers of those who fear and love Him; God provides and protects those who ask. It is a poem for the strong and the vulnerable; it has been in regular use for Jewish morning and evening prayer services in synagogues and could be used as a Christian doxology.

In our Mark passage, after teaching with authority at the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus heals a demon-possessed man who challenges him. Much like we do after church, Jesus and four of his disciples needed to rest and to eat, so they went to the closest home, Simon Peter's. The remains of the house are still there as we saw on our trip to Israel. In the fourth century, someone built a protective wall around what was a two-story house with several rooms for family and friends, but seventh century Muslim invaders destroyed much of it. Today, a modern octagonal synagogue is built over the remains for weather and people protection. There is some uncertainty that it is the house of our story, but it is definitely a house similar to what was described in Scripture, and it fits that there would be a house close by to the synagogue (84 feet away according to one source but I did not measure it!). So, it is known as Peter's house.

It is assumed that Peter was married before he was called to be a disciple. It was common to gather at someone's home for a meal and conversation after the services, much as we go to a local restaurant after church. Peter's mother-in-law apparently served often as hostess to this group after services. This day, she was not doing well and had a fever. When Jesus discovered it, he touched her, and the fever left her body immediately and completely; you know sometimes that happens yet the

fever comes back after the medicine wears off or you still feel unwell. Not so with his mother-in-law. Nor was she left weak, cold, or clammy. We know this was a supernatural healing because she was strong and back to her old self quickly; she got up from her bed and prepared them all a meal.

After dinner, even more people came to the courtyard to receive Jesus' healing. It was shared in the community that Jesus had God's authority to cure all ills, and so they came. Even this early in his ministry, the demons knew he was the Son of God and had Messianic power, so Jesus commands the demons to be silent to keep this secret, so his ministry could go on. The news did travel fast, however, and there were too many people for him to heal, so in the verses following today's passage (35-39), Jesus goes off to a solitary place to recharge and be with his father, God. Jesus knew the benefits of what we call today "life/work balance", so you too please enjoy today's Sabbath and tomorrow's special labor holiday. And spend some time with Jesus. Amen. |/

**Will you pray with me?** All powerful God, we thank you for **our** health. We thank you for the supernatural healing available to each of us through salvation, eternal life, and the cross symbolism of bread and juice as we prepare ourselves for Communion. Lord, we humble ourselves, whether weak or strong, in the presence of your healing power. Keep us and those we love safe, strong, healthy, faithful, and motivated to continue serving those you place before us. Let us proclaim your name in all we do, for it is in your name that we pray and dedicate our lives.

**Amen.**