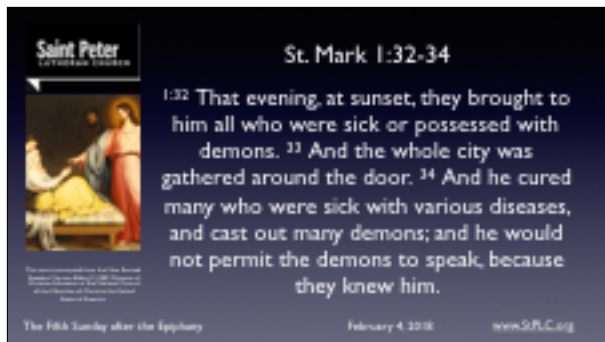


Can you imagine the scene? Just minutes earlier, Jesus had come upon a man in the synagogue whose life had been overcome by an unclean spirit. With a word, Jesus commands the spirit to come out of the man, and in an instant the man is free again. Now Jesus and his entourage are across the street in Peter's home, where his wife's mother is dangerously ill. Having just seen what they saw, it is no surprise they immediately tell Jesus about her. Jesus makes his way to where she lays, he lifts her up by the hand, the fever leaves her, and she is able to return to her life again.

This 19th Century painting by John Bridges says it all, doesn't it? From the concerned look of family and friends, to the hopeful expression on her face, to the imposing stance of Jesus — you can tell something extraordinary is about to happen. And it does. What a day this is, in Capernaum. And Jesus is just getting started!




It isn't surprising to see how the townsfolk respond. By evening, troubled souls from all over town — probably from all over the region — are brought to Simon's house. Over and over again the story is repeated. Those who are suffering find healing and new life at the hand of Jesus. He raises them from their brokenness.

Their lives are given back to them.

The whole town must have been beside itself in excitement. In a world where there is no discernible line between demon possession, serious illness, and mental health issues, hope has arrived. Life will never again be the same frightening reality it had been.

The friends and neighbors of Simon have to be elated at the difference this newcomer is making. They can't wait for him to hang up a shingle and be available to them on a full time basis.

3



St. Mark 1:35-38a

35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36 And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37 When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." 38 He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns..."


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Which is why the next day is so confusing to them. Simon and the others arise, no doubt with images in their minds of the many others Jesus is about to touch in their hometown. But he is nowhere to be found. Gone without a trace! They hunt everywhere for him. They search far and wide — all over town, and then begin to fan out beyond the boundaries of that city. Finally, they make their way out into a deserted place, and find him there praying.

Both frightened that they had almost lost him, and relieved that they had actually found him, they tell him that the lines are already forming at Simon's house. There are more people to heal back in town. He had better hurry back with them and get to work.

His response? "Let us go on to the neighboring towns..." In the face of this overwhelming need, Jesus chooses to leave.

4



St. Mark 1:38-39

38 He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." 39 And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

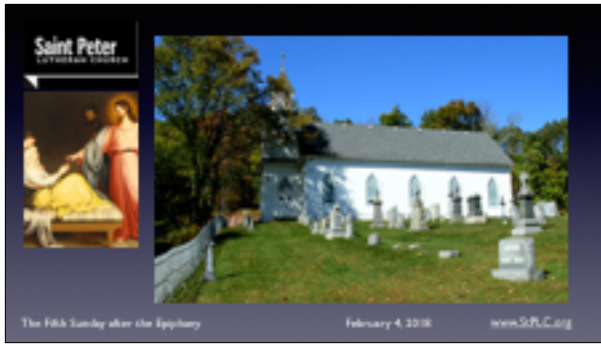
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But of course, we aren't surprised, are we? We know Jesus doesn't come to this world to establish a successful health care delivery system in Capernaum. His mission is much wider and much more inclusive than this. He has come to proclaim his message, and to cast out demons — and with a heart for the entire world.

St. Mark will show us how the proclamation of Christ, and his healing presence, does indeed travel throughout Galilee, from the north to the south; from the land of the Gentiles to the heart of Jerusalem. And the book of Acts will describe how it spreads throughout the world.

At every step of the way, Jesus makes a profound impact on those he serves, healing them, freeing them, making them whole again. And at every step of the way, his approach is the same: after touching their hearts and lives, it is time to "go on to the neighboring towns... for that is what I came out to do."

5



The mission of Jesus — the message he comes to proclaim — the mission of the Christian church — is one that will continue to push back the boundaries, always moving out and beyond where it currently is.

Mike Yaconelli used to tell a story. I've shared it here before. In WW II, a group of soldiers was fighting in France. During an intense battle, an American soldier was killed. His comrades wanted to give him a decent burial. They carried him a few miles to a church behind the front lines with a small cemetery surrounded by a white fence out back.

An old, frail priest responded to their knock. "Our friend was killed in battle," they said, "and we want to give him a church burial."

6



Apparently the priest understood what they were asking, although he spoke in very broken English. "I'm sorry," he said, "but we can only bury people from our own faith here." Warily, the soldiers simply turned to walk away. "But," the old priest called after them, "you can bury him outside the fence."

Disappointed and exhausted, the soldiers dug a grave and buried their friend just outside the white fence. They finished after nightfall.

The next morning, the entire unit was ordered to move on, and the group raced back to the little church for one final goodbye to their friend. When they arrived, they couldn't find the gravesite.



7

Tired and confused, they knocked on the door of the church. They asked the priest if he knew where they had buried their friend. “It was dark last night and we were exhausted. We must have been disoriented.”

A smile flashed across the old priest’s face. “After you left last night, I couldn’t sleep, so I went out early this morning and moved the fence out to include him.”

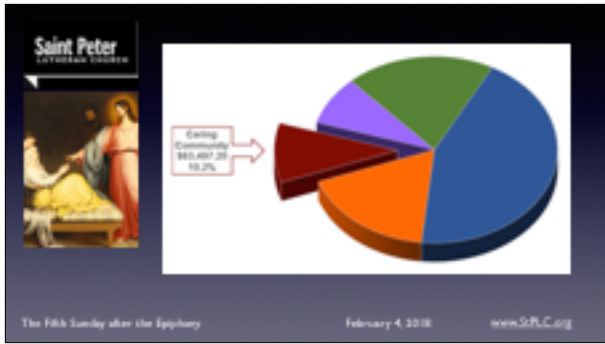
Jesus shows us, today, that following him has to do with continually moving the fence out to include others. Our faith is not just a gift to us; one we are called to embrace and enjoy. It is also a calling to reach out beyond ourselves, and become the difference Jesus wants to make in this world.



8

You’ve heard the saying, “Charity begins at home.” You may also have heard people opposing this notion, arguing that our first call is to make a difference in the world. Isn’t it enlightening to see that Jesus may well have taped this saying up on the refrigerator in his flat at Capernaum? He does begin at home. “... the whole city is gathered around the door. And he cures many who are sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.”

But even as the people of Capernaum are crying out for more, Jesus doesn’t stay there. He can’t stay there. He has other work to do; other people to reach; other needs to meet; other hearts to touch. And so “he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.”



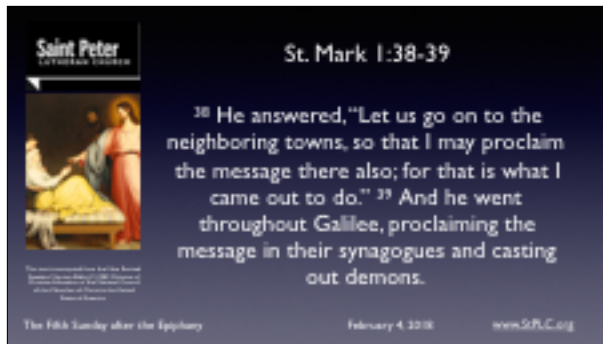
I have to tell you: I am so grateful Saint Peter is a congregation that understands this. There are, in our midst, some deeply caring people. Through ministries like Stephen Ministries, Share Our Suppers, the Saint Peter Stitchers, prayer teams that spend time with friends before surgery — and through less structured ways that members of this community stay connected with each other, and care for each other — through these kinds of efforts, charity does indeed begin at home for us here at Saint Peter.

And for us, this important aspect of our ministry is only the beginning. The beginning of something even wider; even larger.



Like Jesus, we too continue to press on, and push out the boundaries. Covenant Cupboard. Selian Lutheran Hospital. The ALMC School of Nursing. Lutheran Family Services. Habitat for Humanity. Pack to School. Christmas gift sharing. The list goes on and on. I am so grateful to belong to a congregation that values both caring for one another, and giving of ourselves to God's world.

And what's more, I am regularly surprised to learn about the many individual commitments that members and friends of Saint Peter make to their communities. Some we catch wind of from time to time, and some we never even hear about. But the difference you make is significant, both in the ways that it helps people in need, and the statement it makes about what our faith is all about.



11

Jesus displays a deep love and care for the people of his adopted hometown. He also has a sense of mission that reaches far beyond that town, including all the villages and communities of Galilee, and eventually reaching to every corner of this world.

How will our congregation continue to be inspired by this? And what commitment is each of us willing to make to live this out in our individual lives? These questions lie at the very heart of today's story — and at the very heart of the faith that has called us here this morning.

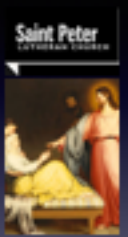


12

So let's keep talking about them.

As you leave today, our hosts have a devotional tool — a conversation starter — for you. I hope you'll spend some time on the way home from worship, over lunch, or over dinner, on how these two strong commitments are a part of your daily life. And I'd love to hear from you what that looks like in your life.

13



**Saint Peter**  
LITURGICAL LECTIONARY

Hymn of the Day

Please stand, and sing they Hymn of the Day.

1<sup>st</sup> Service  
Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness  
(page 32)

2<sup>nd</sup> Service  
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty  
(page 36)

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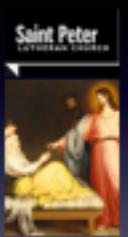
1st Service

Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness  
(page 32)

2nd Service

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty  
(page 36)

14



**Saint Peter**  
LITURGICAL LECTIONARY

St. Mark 1:29-39

<sup>29</sup> As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. <sup>31</sup> He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. <sup>32</sup> That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. <sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered around the door. <sup>34</sup> And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.


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**Saint Peter**  
LITURGICAL CALENDAR

**St. Mark 1:29-39**



25 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 26 And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 27 When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." 28 He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." 29 And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

The iconographical type of Jesus seated on a bed, surrounded by people, is an ancient and widespread motif of the Resurrection. It is also the type of the Last Judgment, where Jesus is seated on a throne, surrounded by the dead.

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