

Mark D. Reichert

Epiphany 4 – Mark 1:29-39 – Chicken Soup for the Sin-Sick Soul

1/31-2/4/24 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

You remember how when you were younger, there was nothing like a hot bowl of homemade chicken soup when you were sick? I don't know what it was about it, but nothing made you feel better than that. Nothing helped get you on the road to recovery faster than when your mom made you a big, steaming bowl of chicken soup... even if it came out of a can that said Campbell's on the side.

And you know, that's exactly what Jesus is like for us, too, only in a much bigger, better way – he's Chicken Soup for the Sin-Sick Soul. But see, Jesus doesn't just make us *feel* better when we're down, when we're sick, and when we have problems in this world. Jesus really fixes what's broken. Jesus actually *makes* us better.

And if we saw what the disciples saw that day, we'd have no question about that. The disciples had just spent all day with Jesus in the synagogue, where he was preaching and doing miracles. It's no surprise that all the people there were amazed at him, because they'd never seen anyone preach and act with that kind of authority.

So at the end of the day as they were leaving, heads still spinning from what they'd seen and heard, Peter decides to bring Jesus into his home, thinking that maybe Jesus could do something about his mother-in-law's sickness. I mean, if anyone could, it was him; that was obvious from what they'd just seen. It seems like Simon's mother-in-law was in pretty rough shape – it says she was in bed with a fever, but this wasn't just some cold that she needed a little rest and fluids to kick. This was the kind of fever that came with serious illness. This was the kind of fever that might have made them wonder if she was even going to survive.

And then on top of that, “*that evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed.*” Before long all sorts of other people with various kinds of illnesses were thinking the same thing as Peter. Drove of people showed up at Jesus' door looking for relief.

But compared to some in the crowd, the people with those illnesses were well off. Among them were people whose whole body and will and functions were taken control of by a demon, so that the things it says and does are not what that person would normally say and do, or even be able to. These people were demon possessed, living under the direct power of the devil and his evil angels. Whatever the demon wanted to do with you, it did... even if it wanted to torture and kill you or others. It could hardly get any worse than that.

So then why Jesus? Why did they come to him? Didn't they have doctors, people who could take care of some of these things? Well, word had spread that this teacher from Nazareth was like chicken soup for the sin-sick soul. If you have problems, he's the one to talk to because he can make everything better. These were people who had come to grips with the fact that they had no power in and of themselves to do anything about their problems, and they needed help. There are some things in our lives that we just can't fix, that we just plain have to deal with – they understood that as well as anyone. But still they came, in new and special hope, because they heard about someone who could.

So imagine that scene – people come up, eager and desperate, burning with fever, riddled with pox, tortured by the devil, and who knows what else. This was an emergency room's worst nightmare! Maybe for much of their lives these people had searched in vain for relief, and here they finally found it. With a touch or with a word, it didn't matter. Jesus healed them. Jesus showed them that they were right to come to him, right to trust in him. Jesus showed them that he had the power to make everything that was wrong with them go away and to put an end to all their suffering.

And even the *demons* couldn't stand against Jesus. Jesus drove those demons out without even a fight. No backtalk, no argument. Simply, “come out,” and they came out. Period. Who is this guy? Who does that? Well, *God* does that. Those demons knew who Jesus was, because they knew Jesus before he was born as a baby in Bethlehem. Jesus just kept them quiet because *they* didn't have the right to relay *his* message. But that *is* the point he wanted to make. If Jesus has the power and authority to do all these things, then this must be God in the flesh, come down to save his people.

And that's what he wants you to know now, too. Sicknesses, illnesses, diseases of all kinds – these are all the results of sin in our lives that show that this world is fundamentally broken. But Jesus healed these people to show that he can fix what's broken and to give us comfort and assurance and a foretaste of what it'll be like in heaven one day when he finally fixes all of us for good.

You see, our Savior holds cancer patients in his hands, like he did for Peter's mother-in-law. He knows the needs of the diabetic and those with all kinds of debilitating illnesses and allergies. He can exorcise the worst of your demons – even if they're only in your head and your heart. He's the solid Rock you can lean on, even if you've had health problems all your life or it looks like you might for the rest of it.

See, Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law and he spent all day healing crowds of people because that's how much he loves us and cares about us. He's chicken soup for the sin-sick soul. He wants to make us better. He has the heart of a Savior, and even still now he wants

you to go to him for help like all these people did. When you don't have anywhere else to go, go to Jesus. He'll either fix your problem now, or he'll do it one day soon. See, he's called you to be his child, and the Bible says that those he calls he also glorifies. That means the time is coming soon when all our troubles, all our problems, will finally be gone. And friends, it's not a question of *if*; it's simply a question of *when*.

But the hard part is that that *when* might not be now. After all, Jesus doesn't promise to remove every symptom of sin from our lives, not as long as we live in this sinful world. No, he came for something so much bigger.

It's just that most people didn't understand that. Lots of those people crowded around Jesus, just hoping that he'd make them *feel* better for a bit, whether they were the ones being healed or they were just there for the show. All they wanted to do was get their minds off of reality for a while. Even the disciples didn't quite get that Jesus didn't just come to wow people.

So that night, after the crowds went home, Jesus went out by himself to pray. See, Jesus' focus was always on the disease of sin, not just the symptoms. Jesus didn't care that he was getting famous; the job he came to do still wasn't done. So Jesus spoke to his Father to thank him for what was behind and to strengthen him for what was ahead. But all of the sudden the disciples came out to track him down because they thought he was ducking good opportunities and publicity. "What are you doing? Why did you sneak away like this? You still have work to do, so get back into town! There are people waiting for you! Everyone's looking for you!"

The disciples still didn't understand why Jesus was truly here and what he brought to the table for us and for our salvation. And even now, lots of Christians fall into those same wrong ideas. We think that when we ask Jesus for things, he should spoil us. He should be waiting on us to give us whatever we want, here and now. But the problem is that God doesn't give us this special privilege of prayer to be a magic charm to fulfill all our worldly pleasures. So don't hold it against Jesus if he doesn't always answer your prayers the way you want him to.

No matter what the TV preachers might say, God's purpose on this earth is not simply to prosper us materially. If he does, then God be praised; he certainly is loving and powerful enough to do it. But we can't force our false conception of a Savior on Jesus. He didn't come into this world to impress anyone or to give anyone a cushy life. So don't expect Jesus to be a Savior he never meant to be, because if you forget his purpose or discount his wisdom or try to hold him to promises he didn't make, you'll be making the same mistake his disciples did.

No, Jesus didn't just come to do miracles. He didn't just come to treat the symptoms, to make us *feel* better for a while – and what he said and how he reacted to the disciples when they

tracked him down proved that. Hear the determination and the urgency in his voice: "*Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.*" Jesus came as the only one who could actually fix what was broken inside of us. He came to be chicken soup for our sin-sick souls, to *make* us better. He came with the resolve to be no less than our Savior from death and the devil, and so on he went, healing and preaching the Gospel, with you in mind every step of the way.

And so on his Gospel message still goes even now, because we all have that sickness that's much more than physical. It's sin, and no amount of vaccines, medication, and therapy can cure it. The only cure for this disease, for sin and all its effects, is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ himself.

All those miracles Jesus did were only ever signs pointing to who he was and what he came to do. They were meant to show that he was exactly who he said he was. This was God made flesh, and if he could take away the symptoms, he most certainly could and one day would take away our ultimate Disease of sin once and for all. Jesus' miracles prepared the people for that Gospel message.

Preaching the message was always Jesus' top priority. The miracles were never the mission itself. That's why Jesus always went away when the crowds starting getting too crazy. They lost touch with what his purpose really was. That's why Jesus went off to pray to the Father. He had a much more important task to carry out than just being a celebrity preacher or miracle worker. People needed to know that he was going to fix everything that was broken in this life because of sin, and eventually even the sin itself. He was going to fix it all forever by taking all our sin upon himself and dying with it on the cross.

And even now that it seems like the miracles have died down, that Gospel still goes on to do the greatest miracle of them all – working living, saving faith in the hearts of everyone who believes in him. That was Jesus' purpose. *You* were his purpose, because you need to know that whatever struggles you have, Jesus has full and complete power over them – whether he decides to show it right now or not. Just know that one day, he will.

See, for Peter's mother-in-law and all the rest of those people who put their trust in him, Jesus was like a big, steaming-hot bowl of homemade chicken soup. He made them better, and he makes you better, too. What Jesus does for you isn't just meant to take your mind off of reality for a while or dull the pain for the time being. It's meant to give your life real purpose – real thanks and hope and joy. Because Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again for you, he fixed what's broken, cured the disease, took away your sin, and gave you new life for now and for eternity. My friends, that's Chicken Soup for the Sin-Sick Soul. Amen.