

Epiphany 5—February 7, 2021
Text: Mark 1:29-39
Theme: Both Great and Small

Last week we heard that Jesus taught as one who had authority. He overruled all the laws of society that, in reality, serve society and not God. He proclaimed the law of love, the love that he brings to us and with which he fills us up and forgives us of all our sins so that we might live lives of freedom, unbound by the silly conventions and demands of a fallen and broken world. This week, we see Jesus not just proclaiming his authority but demonstrating it.

He walked into Peter's home and saw that Peter's mother-in-law had fallen ill. We don't know what was wrong with her, but the fact that she had a fever was an indication in that day that it was serious. Think about it. You get a fever that lasts too long or goes too high and you call the doctor. Often, he will send out antibiotics without even seeing you. You take the magic potion and voila! You're healed! There was no such magic potion until the 1900s. In Jesus' day, a fever indicated something serious that might kill you. There was no cure beyond trying to lower the fever with natural remedies and then wait and see what happens. Beyond that, ice was in short supply in the Middle East in those days. Jesus, on the other hand just walks in, touches her hand and she was completely healed. She wasn't just better. She was healed. She got up and went about the work of serving all the people who had just

marched into her home. That's the authority of Jesus in action. He even has authority over the microbes and bacteria so much so that he can command them to leave and they do.

The healing of Peter's mother-in-law is important because it is both great and small. It is great in that Jesus can do that which not even the greatest physicians on earth can do. He can speak against disease and drive it out immediately. It is small in that Jesus cares about a nobody. Peter's mother-in-law is so insignificant that the evangelist either doesn't know her name or doesn't think it is worth us knowing. Like all of us, she doesn't really matter in the great scheme of things and yet Jesus stopped what he was doing and took his time and effort to heal her.

The great part of this miracle is important because we live in a world that is full of itself. Philosophers on types of media are never shy in spouting their opinions and their advice about every facet of life. So-called journalists on television are happy to spin everything so that simpletons like us can understand their complex opinions. I grow weary of people beating their own drum so loudly that they will either deafen their opposition or drive them far enough away so as to imagine their own victory. Jesus reminds us in this miracle that all of those giant intellects who inflict us with their wisdom cannot even command a simple, itty-bitty bacterium. They have no

real power in this universe and we can laugh in the face of their pomposity.

We can laugh in the face of our own pomposity as well. Who among us has not at one time or another been so sure that we were right, that we dug ourselves into a hole from which we could not extract ourselves? When that happens, we too often shut ourselves off from everyone for fear that we will be mocked or ridiculed, or that our lack of knowledge and power will be discovered. And that is a possibility. But the reality is that we need one another and we need help to be pulled up out of the holes we dig for ourselves.

Perhaps you have heard the story of the person who fell in the hole. One person came along, looked down and said, "Ha! Ha! You fell in a hole!" and then he went merrily along. Another person came along and said, "Oh my, you're in a hole! I'll pray for you," and then went on his way. Finally, the person's friend came to the edge of the hole and looked in. "Hey!" the person in the hole said. "Please pull me up!" The friend nodded and then jumped down inside the hole with him. "Why did you do that?" asked the person in the hole. "Now we're both stuck down here!" "Yes," said the friend, "but I've been here before and I know the way out!"

The small part of this miracle reminds us that as Jesus cared for Peter's mother-in-law, so Jesus cares deeply about the least of us. He jumped down into the hole with us and he paid for the way out. Whatever trial you face in your life is not a trial of which our Lord is unaware or about which he does not care. He may or may not deliver you from that trial in the way you are expecting. You might be demanding that he throw down a rope when in fact he has already jumped down to be at your side. He will do what needs to be done depending on what you need. He is very aware of your trials now and always. It may not be a big deal. It probably isn't. But you have no need to think you are alone in facing it. The Lord is with you and in you. His body and blood, the very body and blood that hung on the cross to forgive your sins, flow through you. You have the strength to do whatever he commands you to do. You have the power to walk whatever path he has laid out for you. He cares about you deeply, even you, one small person in the universe, just like he cared about Peter's mother-in-law lying ill with a fever.

In the times of the Bible, illness was the great hardship. There were no hospitals. Physicians came equipped, at best, with leeches and oil. The specialists might have had a collection of maggots as well. When you got an infection or a disease, it was terrifying because you knew how it very well could end. Today, we don't fear

illness and disease nearly so much but the point of the healing miracles is not Jesus' mastery over microbes – though he surely is the master of all. The point of the healing miracles is Jesus' mastery over our fear. We have nothing to fear in this world and if we can get over our fear, then we are truly free. Whatever you fear today, Jesus has jumped down into that hole with you and Jesus has already mastered that which is scaring you. Jesus is with you and in you and you will overcome anything. He has guaranteed it with his own life and soul.