**Mark 1:29-39**

And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. **30** Now Simon’s mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. **31** And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them. **32** That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. **33** And the whole city was gathered together at the door. **34**  And he healed 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. **35**  And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. **36** And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, **37** and they found him and said to him, “Everyone is looking for you.” **38** And he said to them, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” **39**  And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

**“The Word Front And Center”**

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord (2 Peter 1:2). Amen. Attention plays an important role for us as human beings. It is a building block for healthy marriages, raising children, good government, and even a successful business. Sadly, we do not need to look too hard to know the outcome of when attention is lost. Our first parents distracted by the Devil denied God’s Word only to plunge humanity into utter sin and death. Worse than data showing attention spans among people shrank 50% in past decade, is that what receives our attention matters just as much. This is why we turn our attention today to God praying, “…keep Your family the Church continually in the true faith that, relying on the hope of Your heavenly grace, we may ever be defended by Your mighty power.”

Attention to life and salvation means needing a better reliance on God. Of course, plenty question and doubt whether God is attune to our day-to-day life that has one struggle after another. Isaiah answers us with this promise, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.” Our ways are not beyond God as if He is too busy or does not care for every person. St. Mark writes an attention grabbing record of Christ for those distracted by the darkness. He shows how God comes into a chaotic world with His compassion as Savior. Focus on the Gospel is foundational. God’s Son says today, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” We can turn to Jesus because He cares to pay attention to our lives.

Jesus cares with faithfulness and does not force Himself on anyone. After He cast out a demon on the Sabbath day, people were heading home amazed over, “A new teaching with authority!” They had seen quite a spectacle in the synagogue, but that was about the extent of it. However, like going out to brunch or eating with the family on Sunday. Jesus received an invite to the home of Peter and Andrew. It was to eat the evening meal celebrating how the Sabbath was over. Opening their domestic life to Jesus was what He gladly accepted without question. No sooner than entering the home did Jesus find no rest for “The Lord” of the Sabbath. The mother-in-law of Peter afflicted with fever needed His attention. With a hand extended, Jesus graciously gave relief along with joy to watch her serve their guests.

God wants to be in our lives with His faithfulness as Savior. Jesus brings this to us today by Word and Sacrament for His Church. Except, we tend to place a strong division between public and private life, but that is not how Jesus sees it. All families need His healing presence. All need Him in their day-to-day lives. Yet, the Lord and the servants of His Word do not force their foot in the door. As Pastor, I fail when my tasks come off so busy as if my highest calling is not to bring the healing Word of God for your lives. Likewise, you fail when there is no invitation to bring the called servant of Christ into your life for your good. This is why we need Jesus because He alone is faithful where we fail. He does not disappoint or come off the wrong way. Jesus knows and cares in such a way that none goes unattended by Him. The Lord of the Sabbath is our rest so whether public or private, we can serve and obey Him.

Once the Sabbath day ended, a home suddenly turned into a clinic of divine care. Plenty forced their lives on Jesus flooding Him without relief. Who does not monopolize on a good thing? Everyone was doing just that with Jesus. All kinds of people with all kinds of troubles turned to Him for help. This event revealed how much suffering sin causes in the world. It is relentless and goes to the depths of both body and soul. Yet, Christ as the sinless Savior could handle the demand placed on Him. The miracles focused on the short-term needs of the people, but it was only for a time. As the Son of God, Jesus knew the long-term attention had to be the mercy shown by His body and soul on the cross. The whole city gathered at the door of a home, but who boldly will come to the true door of His sacrifice?

Jesus seeks to heal the whole person. What needs do you bring to Him from your daily life? It is in the body where we experience all kinds of suffering from life. Medicine brings relief for a time, but only Christ heals with an enteral hope in Him. His forgiving Word goes out to the chronically ill, the addicted, the unhealthy marriages, resettles persons and whatever suffering sin brings. Likewise, it is in the soul the devil rages to swallow up faith in God’s Son with despair and false promises. Christ speaks forgiveness to remove what we hold in our hearts with regret, anger, shame, and above of all unbelief. Like those gathering at the door, we now gather around the Word and Sacrament confessing our need for Jesus. His thoughts, Words and deeds seek to heal the good and cast out the devil’s lies. God cares for you because what fell on His Son in death has risen with the cure of life for us in His Name.

Mercy was manifest that night in Capernaum. Yet, the next day there were other plans in mind. Jesus turned His attention to glory in the promise of the Gospel. He retreated to a desolate place to pray because the temptation was that the people were going to make Him king. Even the disciples when they finally found him had the wrong kind of Messiah in mind. How much it must have pierced Him to hear them say, “Everyone is looking for you.” It was no compliment, but a cage for the Gospel where men would place lesser priorities over what was most important. To go on from there to others towns was a relief. Redemption in Christ was to be free so that preaching, healing, and driving out demons would be for all in a sinful world.

How comfortable are the trappings of our church in this culture. There are more than enough resources, pastors, teachers, and ways to hear the Gospel. Yet, many are simply going after miracles and not the message that God saves sinners in Christ. Jesus tells us as His disciples, “Let us to go on to the next towns.” I recently read about a man in the Dadaab Refugee Camp located in Kenya near the Somalia border. He is a Lutheran seeking to translate the Small Catechism into the language of his people. These half million mostly Christians live in the hostile territory of Ethiopia and South Sudan. But He had this to say, “Anyuak churches have no strong foundation of faith. WE have a lack of educated theologians and have only about 20 pastors…I hope that the catechism may pave the way to open more Lutheran churches in our community.” (LHF Jan/Feb 2015).

Of course, we can treat this story to be out of sight and out of mind to us on the other side of the world. However, God is paying attention to this man’s deep desire for the Gospel. What is the priority? St. Paul says, “I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.” For all the distractions Jesus came to preach good news to the poor and those in need of Him. He still does that through preachers and His body of believers, the Church. Our glory is the promise of the Gospels for the more we share it, the more Christ stays front and center for us with His Word. We can turn to Jesus because He cares to pay attention to our lives. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.