

Did you know that your church-body, the WELS, has a medical mission in Central Africa? It opened in 1961 in a village in Northern Zambia. Since then it's grown to include a mobile clinic in neighboring Malawi that services four different sites around the capital, Lusaka. All told, some 80,000 patients are served each year by the medical mission, getting treatment they otherwise couldn't that in many cases saves their lives.

But as important as that work is, it's not the most important work they do. It is, after all, a medical *mission*. So the first thing in their mission statement? "Communicate Christ's love" to their patients. The first thing they do with the patients who line up outside their door every morning? Share the gospel with them – the good news of a Savior from sin.

I mention it not just because I want you to be aware of our synod's mission work around the world. I mention it because in the gospel lesson this morning, you could say that Jesus is on a medical mission of his own. The people of Capernaum are bringing all their sick to the house where Jesus is staying. And as we see the Great Physician in action, we notice how he treats his patients with power and compassion unlike any earthly doctor has. But like our medical mission, Jesus never forgot that there was a greater need his patients had. That there was a greater mission he had come to fulfill. And here's why it matters: You're still under the care of the Great Physician. And the way he dealt with his patients then is the way he deals with his patients still today: 1) He cares about what ails you. 2) He cares most about what matters most.

**<sup>29</sup> As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. <sup>30</sup> Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. <sup>31</sup> So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.**

**<sup>32</sup> That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. <sup>33</sup> The whole town gathered at the door, <sup>34</sup> and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.**

**<sup>35</sup> Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. <sup>36</sup> Simon and his companions went to look for him, <sup>37</sup> and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"**

**<sup>38</sup> Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." <sup>39</sup> So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.**

Jesus' medical mission begins on the Sabbath Day – the same Sabbath you heard about last week, when Jesus preached in the synagogue in Capernaum and drove out a demon to boot. Mark tells us he got invited to Simon Peter's house afterward – and that's when they realize why his mother-in-law couldn't make it to the synagogue that day. She was bed-ridden with a fever.

And it's amazing to see the Great Physician go to work, isn't it? Maybe the first thing we notice is his power. This woman's fever is so high it has her too weak to get out of bed. But Jesus simply reaches out and takes her hand, and it's gone in an instant. So gone that she hops out of bed and starts waiting on her guests.

But maybe what jumps out at us most is his compassion. After sunset, Sabbath is over, and Mark says the whole town shows up at the door. All sorts of people are suffering from all sorts of ailments that sin brought into the world – common colds to cancer, depression to demon-possession. Think of it: It's night time. Been a long day. Any one of us might have been tempted to tell them to come back tomorrow and shut the door.

But not Jesus. Do you see the compassion in his eyes as he looks at them? The world he created in the beginning had none of this misery. Now he sees bodies he designed to live forever broken. Pain he never planned to be a part of the human experience. People who were meant to be the dwelling place of the Spirit inhabited by demons. And it breaks his heart.

So he goes to work. As the Son of God, he could well have snapped his fingers and healed them all en masse and headed to bed. But not Jesus. He tends to them, one by one, personally. Each one matters, each one is important. He wasn't afraid to touch the sick and the smelly. He laid his hands on each one, giving them all just the care they needed, into the wee hours of the night, until the last disease was healed and the last demon driven out.

Friends, Jesus' power hasn't changed. Compassion hasn't changed. That's good, because life here hasn't changed. The people of Capernaum had their problems, and so do we. Suffering from all sorts of things that Jesus never wanted to be a part of this world. Little things like colds, big things like cancer. Physical hurts and emotional hurts. Demons can't possess us, but they daily tempt us. So what a comfort it is to know that Jesus hasn't changed. You're not just a number to him. He doesn't shut the door and tell you to come back tomorrow; you're on his heart 24/7. No matter how little or big, when you hurt, he hurts, too. He's not a distant and disinterested Savior who keeps an arms distance from messy people with their problems. And his promise is to use his power over it all to give you just the care you need.

But that can leave us with a nagging question, can't it? Why doesn't he do more? He stayed up that night in Capernaum until every hurt was gone. Why doesn't he get always get rid of our cancers and colds? Why doesn't he use his power to shut the demon's mouth when they try to tempt us?

It's a question that might be more theoretical in nature when life is good. But the sharper the suffering gets, the sharper the question can become. When the pain isn't temporary, but chronic...the cancer treatment doesn't work...the depression or temptation doesn't go away, in spite of all our prayers asking for it to be so. We can start to wonder what Jesus is up to. If the Great Physician's care is everything the pages of scripture make it out to be – if he cares at all.

So let's go back to Capernaum. Because wondering what Jesus was up to – that's what we find the disciples doing. Jesus wakes up while it's still dark, and sneaks out of the house to a solitary place to pray. The disciples wake up to people knocking on the door again – more suffering for the Physician to take care of. Only he's not in. The disciples head out to find him, and when they do, Peter says for the bunch, "Lord, **everyone is looking for you!**"

And how does Jesus respond? <sup>38</sup> **Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."** It's not that Jesus didn't care about the suffering people in Capernaum; he wasn't leaving to be rid of them. It's that Jesus cared most about what mattered most.

We look for this in doctors. When you go to the doctor's office, you don't just want a doctor who will treat the symptoms of what's ailing you. That's not what matters most. You want a doctor who will cure the disease. What good does it do you to feel better if you're still sick and dying?

Those miracles in Capernaum - the Great Physician wasn't curing the disease. He was treating the symptoms. All of the suffering that broke Jesus' heart that day could trace its way back to one moment in time, one root problem: Sin. When sin entered the world, the results were far worse than just broken bodies and suffering now. No, sin is the disease that infects our hearts. It leaves us with a broken relationship with God and suffering forever in hell.

The disciples struggled to grasp that. They were more concerned about Jesus taking care of the symptoms than the disease. And isn't it true for us, too? It's what can lead us to question God's will when he leaves suffering to linger in our lives. It's the reason why, if we're brutally honest with ourselves, we're bothered more by the hurt he allows in our life than the sins we commit against God. It's why we're often more concerned about our own and our loved ones health and happiness than we are concerned about our relationships with God.

Thank God Jesus cared most about what matters most. I wonder if that wasn't why he left to pray. Becoming a miracle doctor in Capernaum would have been a pretty sweet and popular gig. Do you think he was asking for his Father's help, to keep before his eyes what mattered most? That he'd come not just to take away the symptoms, but cure the disease.

Whether he prayed for it or not, he showed it. He left Capernaum for the other cities of Galilee. Not just to treat more symptoms with his miracles; no, **so he could preach there also.** Share the same message he shared in Capernaum - him as Savior from sin - message that worked faith, forgave sins, granted life eternal. The message that cured the disease.

He showed it even more clearly at the cross. The Physician with all the power in the world to save himself cared so much for you that he chose not to, so that by his wounds you would be healed. Where Jesus took the disease - your sins and mine - and made them his own. Where he suffered the torments of hell that we deserve for them, taking our sins away. If you thought he did a good job of healing bodies in Capernaum, see how thorough his work in healing your soul is: From the cross flows forgiveness for all of your sins, no matter what they are. In the cross, you're made whole again - holy in God's eyes - your relationship with him fully restored. At the cross, Jesus' death purchased life with God that lasts forever.

In that sense, the doctor's work in Capernaum was really just a cloudy preview. The bodies healed there eventually died. The demons driven out there would return to tempt. But Jesus was giving them - and us - a glimpse of what he's won for us and will do for us when he returns. He'll raise all the dead. He'll give us glorified bodies that will never break down or get sick again. He'll give us a place where the devil will never tempt, sin will be forever a thing of the past, and so will all the hurts it brought into the world. A place - and a people - fully healed.

In the meantime, you're under the Physician's perfect care. Even when he lets the sickness or the sadness or the struggle linger, he has your ultimate healing in mind. Did you notice how that was true, even in this lesson? All those people in Capernaum with all those problems. I'm sure they'd rather have never had them in the first place! But they were just what the doctor ordered. Because their suffering brought them to Jesus, who perfectly cared for them. Who had a message that would heal them forever.

He uses yours for the same purpose: To keep you coming to him. To keep you hearing his Word, where he gives you just the comfort, strength - the personal care you need. To keep you healed and heading for heaven. To keep you caring most about what matters most - Jesus and what he's done for you - until he brings you there. Amen.