

A Sermon  
Rev. W. Kevin Holder  
Grace Baptist Church  
Bryans Road, Maryland  
February 4, 2024

## **When the Gospel Comes Home**

Mark 1:29-39

"The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). As I emphasized last Sunday, that's the heart of Jesus' first sermon as he begins his public ministry. He announces the arrival of God's reign of justice and peace, the long-awaited age to come when God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. And the appropriate response to this news of salvation and judgement is repentance and faith. Those who hear the message are called to change their minds and their conduct, turning away from sin and turning toward the Lord who has come to reconcile and redeem.

Jesus then begins enlisting others to join in announcing and enacting this kingdom. He summons two pairs of brothers, Peter and Andrew, and James and John, to become his disciples, learning what it means to proclaim and practice God's reign in the world. So while there is an inward and private dimension to this kingdom, working in the hearts and minds of individuals who hear and believe, there is also a public dimension to God's dominion. It becomes effective and outwardly visible in the lives of communities and households. We see this in the scene right before today's text as Jesus taught and healed at the synagogue in Capernaum. A place of public gathering, a house of fellowship and worship, became the site of confrontation between the power of evil and the power of God. The reign of God took on the forces of death and destruction out in the open, rather than behind closed doors.

But then we move to today's text, where the gospel operates in a more domestic setting. Jesus and his four disciples leave the synagogue and enter a nearby house. Church may be over, but the church's business, the kingdom of God, isn't done for the day. That's because Peter's mother-in-law is sick. Mark describes her as "in bed with a fever" (v. 30). No other details are given. We're probably not dealing with a brief rise in body temperature, something that's just a 24-hour bug of some sort. It's not necessarily the kind of ailment that, given time, will probably pass. In fact, for all we know, it could have been something life-threatening. It was certainly serious enough for others to call in Jesus for help.

Mark says that Jesus "went to her, took her hand and helped her up" (v. 31a). At first glance, that sounds like Jesus is just doing what's physically appropriate to help her get back up on her feet. But the Greek term actually has the deeper sense of "raised." In other words, Jesus "raised her up." The same word is used in other healing stories in Mark, with connotations of resurrection. So it could be that even prior to the culmination of the story of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, we're already getting glimpses of God's life-giving power, God's raising power, at work in and through the ministry of Jesus and his disciples. This means that the miracles narrated in the Gospels are more than just astonishing cases of supernatural activity. They're signs of the inbreaking reign of God, the setting right of what's wrong in the world, including the restoration of broken bodies and lives.

Notice too that having been “raised,” Peter’s mother-in-law “began to wait on them” (v. 31b). Again, terminology is important. The word means she “serves” them. At a literal level it could mean that she’s now able to prepare food and share it with her guests. But in Mark, it’s the same term used to describe how the angels in the wilderness “served” Jesus during his testing (1:13). It’s used to describe the women who followed Jesus and “cared for his needs” (15:41). This type of serving even epitomized Jesus’ own ministry: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (10:45). So Peter’s mother-in-law isn’t just given renewed energy to accomplish a set of menial tasks. She’s actually raised up from the threat of death itself, and restored to her sense of usefulness and purpose, to serve, feed, and provide for others in the household. Here in the opening scenes of Jesus’ ministry is a woman who is brought back to life, physically, relationally, and vocationally. This is the kind of thing that happens when the kingdom of God takes hold in the lives of individuals and communities.

It’s no wonder that Jesus’ reputation began to spread. Mark says, “That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases” (vv. 32-34a). The whole town? Okay, maybe Mark exercises a little hyperbole there, but the point is that the whole community is impacted by the arrival of God’s reign. The sabbath has officially ended, and as night falls folks from all over the neighborhood start showing up on the front porch seeking deliverance from diseases and demons that hold them captive. This is part of what happens when word gets out that the hope of healing is just down the street.

I heard a couple of commentators compare it to the response that took place about three years ago when news was released that COVID-19 vaccines were available and distribution was underway. Recall how governments and health care institutions began setting up vaccine sites in parking lots, schools, gymnasiums, churches, and so on. Many sites were flooded by droves of people seeking protection from disease and death. When news spread that Jesus was performing miracles just a few blocks away, the whole town showed up at Peter’s family home.

In the span of just a few verses, we see a pattern reflected in other parts of Mark. He alternates between scenes in which Jesus is surrounded by a crowd and others in which he teaches his disciples alone inside a house. The kingdom operates in both public settings and private settings. Sometimes Jesus is swamped by people in need, and other times, as we see in the second section of today’s text, he retreats into solitude, alone with God in prayer. But then he re-emerges, ready to preach and practice the reign of God in new territory. Like the reign of God itself, Jesus won’t be confined to just one address. He brings the freedom of the kingdom into other zip codes where the powers of death and destruction need to be cast out.

David Fitch tells about how the prayers of one church vanquished Satan’s grip on a neighborhood:

In 2010 a group of eight people from two churches felt called to the Detroit Boulevard neighborhood of Sacramento. It was known as one of the most notorious crime-ridden neighborhoods in all of Sacramento. Each house in that neighborhood was a place of danger. Nonetheless this group of eight decided to walk through the neighborhood praying over each home and praying for the presence of Christ to reign over violence, addiction, and satanic oppression. They began walking through the neighborhood, praying over each home and rebuking the demonic strongholds of addiction and violence.

One of the eight, former Sacramento police officer and gang detective Michael Xiong, reported that “each time we prayed over the houses, we felt the weight of oppression becoming

lighter.” A woman from one of the houses confronted them. When she discovered they were praying for the community, she asked for healing, and God healed her.

The group soon physically moved into the neighborhood and started what they called Detroit Life Church. A couple years later a local newspaper, the *Sacramento Bee*, reported that there were no homicides, robberies, or sex crimes, and only one assault in Detroit Boulevard between 2013 and 2014. Detroit Boulevard had been transformed by a small group of people who began their ministry in the neighborhood by praying around houses, streets, and parks for the power of Satan to be vanquished. Kingdom prayer in body is what it means to be faithfully present to his presence in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Within that neighborhood were households where the reign of God took hold and the Lord began to govern hearts and minds. As we see in today’s text, the gospel does some of its greatest work within the walls of a home where the presence and power of Christ call forth repentance and faith.

When Peter and the others came looking for Jesus, anticipating another day of ministry in the same location, Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come” (v. 38). Jesus’ preaching strategy ensures that the good news reaches your neighborhood, your street, your address. It works in both public settings and private settings. The fact that the gospel is global also guarantees that it’s local, right down to the life that you share with others within the walls of your own home.

When today’s text opens in the household of Peter and his family, with the healing of his mother-in-law, we’re reminded to reflect on what it means for the gospel to come home. It’s one thing for us to think about the life-changing presence of Christ in other parts of our community, our state, our nation, and our world. When we’re here together on Sundays, we see and hear about the movement of the kingdom through stories we share, literature we read, classes we attend, and videos we watch. But it’s another thing for us to consider the influence of the kingdom in the daily relationships, activities, and events in our own households.

Earlier this week, a partner in a particular ministry arrived late for an online meeting of our committee. He apologized for not joining us earlier, informing us that he had been busy, as he put it, “playing nurse” for his wife, who was recovering from surgery and relied on him to attend to her basic medical needs. To me, this was more than just the fulfillment of his duties as a spouse. It was a way of practicing God’s kingdom, a way of living under the reign of Christ, doing what he could to help raise his wife up in the strength of the Lord. In his care and in her recovery, the reign of God took on concrete form.

This is just one example of the many ways you’re called to follow Jesus by practicing domestic discipleship. In other words, proclaiming and practicing the good news of the kingdom in your own home. This means sharing the life-giving mercy of Christ with the others who make up your household. It means living out the reign of God in your marriage, in your parenting, in your grandparenting, in your relationship with your siblings, in your management of household finances, in your family’s life of prayer and worship. It means relating to others in your household in ways that help raise them up to the service of Christ and his reign, right there where you are, where our Lord has come preaching.

---

<sup>1</sup> David E. Fitch, *Seven Practices for the Church on Mission* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2018) 120-121.