**St. David’s Episcopal Church**

Beanblossom, Indiana

Epiphany 5B, February 4, 2024

Sermon by the Rev. Kate Wilson

### Isaiah 40:21-31 **Psalm 147:1-12, 21c** 1 Corinthians 9:16-23 Mark 1:29-39

**Not given.**

**✠**

Good morning!

Now tell me the truth. How do you feel when you hear the opening of this Gospel?

*Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.*

Can you imagine? Mo-mmm! I’m home with Andrew and three other guys! Where are the pizza rolls? We’re *hon-gry!* Mo-mmm! Aren’t these grown men? Does she swim out with breakfast or lunch while they’re fishing?

Every time I hear or read this verse it irritates me. Can’t they just bring her fresh water, tuck her in, and fend for themselves for once?

And this healing miracle follows close on the tail of the healing of the demoniac in the synagogue we heard last week. Her getting food on the table apparently allowed Jesus to heal scores of local people – “the whole city” – afflicted with all sorts of problems. I’m still not satisfied.

We also learn that the Risen Jesus is with us today. He always was, is now, and always will be with us. So shouldn’t we expect miraculous cures today? Presbyterian minister Mark Davis was raised Pentecostal and taught that we will be cured by the strength of the blood of the cross. Davis wrote a book called *Left Behind and Loving It.* His boyhood church, as do many Pentecostal churches to this day, had traveling healers visit now and again, and brought their stories of miracles that were not so long ago or far away. But Mark became skeptical because he noticed that the lame members of the church still limped, and others still could not hear or see, or said they were ailing, and he knew these people had deep, abiding faith. Maybe, he thought, these cures were about something more than physical change. Either that, he thought, or the spirit of the Risen Christ being with us is just an inspiration.

I know that skepticism. That and many other doubts took me out of the church for quite a long time. But that’s another story. Davis’s Holy Spirit blast came much sooner. He is a biblical scholar and a thoughtful interpreter. He wrote:

*Through the years, my original naive faith was chastened by reality, but the ensuing skepticism has been tempered. I've begun to see that the joy of wholeness is not measured by physical or even psychical perfection, but by connection to human community.*

Human community. Think about it. Peter’s mother-in-law was able to reconnect to her family and the social expectations she most likely had for herself. She could create and nurture a broader community in her home, her son-in-law, Jesus, and others. Her availability led to a huge impact of healings for “the whole city”, as Mark wrote. Certainly, no one would have come near if they knew she had a possibly fatal, and contagious, fever.

Human Community. We heard about the cure of the man afflicted with a demon last week. The importance of the cure is not the cure itself, but the man’s ability to rejoin the community, whole and respected; to rejoin his family, loved and loving.

Consider the lepers Jesus cured. The cure was more than a way of amazing witnesses into faith. The cure brought the healed lepers back to the synagogue, their homes, to pick up their roles in and for their communities.

Jesus’s miracles were not to amaze people into belief, but to connect people to community and purpose. Jesus’s broad ministry of miracles and preaching, loving and admonishing, forgiving and inviting, was an act of building a new society under God’s grace. Jesus invited his disciples into fellowship, sharing his body and blood as a connective to sustain them as they carried the word from that night onward.

When I was a chaplain at Deaconess Hospital in Evansville, a despondent patient admitted his self-disgust at being useless and worthless, as he described it. “What good am I, stuck in this bed? I can’t do a \_\_\_\_ thing. I’m no good at all.” The Holy Spirit suggested that I ask, “Can you pray for the person above you and below you, and for the people on each side of you?” I thought he’d laugh in my face. Instead, he lightened up and said, “I CAN do that!” We **need** purpose. We **need** community even if we don’t know their names.

Did you know that 40% of deaf people, gay people, and Native Americans are alcoholics? 40%. That’s staggering. What do these three very disparate groups have in common? Each is marginalized, intentionally or unintentionally, by the greater community. Each is struggling and isolated. Each can thrive in healing communities.

Surgeon General Murthy released an Advisory titled “Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation” just last year—which was a month ago. Not a press release, but an Advisory. Advisories are reserved for significant public health challenges that require the nation’s immediate awareness and action, that is, a massive corrective approach by everyone: business, heath care, and government. They don’t mention spiritual centers or followers of Jesus, but the work is right down our alley: the subtitle of this advisory is “The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community.” Sounds like Jesus work to me.

The report discloses that disconnection and isolation cause loss of years of life. Those who are disconnected and isolated are more prone to suffer heart attack or stroke. They are more likely to develop other illnesses, making it a national health crisis.

A report by either Pew Research Center or Barna Group, both do studies of churches, disclosed that the primary reason people go to church is to connect to others. Different people are looking for different messages and opportunities, but the common thread is connecting with others and embracing and being embraced by community. This is a miracle story we can, and do, take part in. This is a miracle story we can, and do, share.

Thanks be to God.