

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
Sermon Text: Mark 1:29-39
Related Text: Isaiah 40:21-31
Date Preached: February 8, 2009
Note: Youth Sunday

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, come one, come all. Now appearing in a town near you is Jesus of Nazareth. This Jesus is no ordinary man.

You've heard how he has healed the sick. You've heard John's preaching about him. You've seen men abandon their livelihood to follow him. So come, meet Jesus yourself on Feb. 8th appearing at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Trauger. Bring you sick relatives. Bring the wisest of your household and see how he will astound them. So, come one come all. Admission is free.

For a complete schedule of his upcoming appearances, log onto www.jesustour.org.

Imagine the excitement and fervor of a celebrity coming to town. Wherever Jesus is going word is getting out. Crowds are coming with high expectations and great hope. People aren't just waiting for him to come to them; they are actively seeking him out trying to find out the next city on his touring schedule. That's the kind of thing that the Jesus and the disciples are facing as they travel.

Large gatherings with great speakers can do that. There is incredible energy when people of faith come together both then and now; be it at a Youth Gathering, a Churchwide assembly, or a woman's conference. Just the experience alone is enough to provide a lift in one's spiritual life.

Yet, the lift we receive at such gatherings is not without purpose. Simon's mother-in-law was lifted up. Such a lifting up frees her for service and that is what she does. The others healed in our Gospel lesson were lifted up with a purpose that was important to them then but is a mystery to us.

In gatherings of large groups we can gain ideas, our dreams grow; we are energized to go home and do great things. I've come away from such gatherings with ideas that if I just do this then our congregation can be one of those stories about how we did great things. I've come away thinking that if I could just preach like that speaker, surely we'd grow. And if we'd grow, we'd be able to do more for our community, address the poverty that is around us and do so without any worries about how such ministry would be funded because people would be excited to give as a result.

Of course, it only takes a short time after returning from those gatherings that I come to realize just how much I've tricked myself. As was noted in the children's sermon, the eagle will soar using the wind as a guide. Instead, I fall into the trick of thinking like a hummingbird that the more I flap my wings the more will be accomplished.

The true lift we receive comes not from our own energies. Rather, the lift we receive comes in the form of a hand that reaches down, takes hold of us, and pulls us up out of the quicksand of our sin.

That is what Jesus does. He lifts people up. He lifts us up from the despair, sorrow and humiliation of our brokenness. He accomplished this by being lifted up himself. This lifting up was not with crowds hoisting him up on their shoulders in honor of his healings or celebrating him as the Son of God. This lifting up came with a hammer and nails. It came with screams of anguish and pain. It came on a cross.

The lifting up came through his descent into the utter depths of despair. Only by sinking into death's grip could Jesus truly lift us from that force. That is the power of the resurrection. That is the power of new life. It is a lift that delivers us from all the muck and

sickness that threatens to bring us down. He lifts up for his benefit, for ours and for our neighbors.

Each person healed is lifted up with a purpose. Sometimes that purpose is clear. Other times it remains a mystery. Still to us, it seems like there are those who are never lifted up.

In those times where being lifted up is not seen by our eyes or with our sense of reason, this we know. God doesn't let go of His people. We know this to be true the same way we know all of God's promises to be true.

We live in faith. We live believing that God will accomplish what God has promised. And what God has promised is that those who believe in him, through Jesus Christ our Lord will be lifted up and as expressed in Romans 8, there is absolutely nothing that will separate God from God's people. Amen.