



“I come, that you might have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). This is one of those foundational verses that we ought to hold close to us, especially when times are dark and dreary. When strife is all around us and it can be hard to see the way forward. When we are confused because life is definitely not going smoothly.

God’s desire for us is to be full of life. To live a life that respects the dignity of every part of creation. To live a life that is full to the brim of love and laughter and knowledge that

God is “with us always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

And yet. And yet. Life isn’t always a rose garden as the old song goes. Besides, there are thorns on those roses, so even that image isn’t without its challenges!

We’ve all likely heard this Gospel lesson before. What is new in us or in our readings and hearing of the Word this morning? How is God speaking to us from a text that is perhaps all too familiar and also one that raises a bit of indignation among some of us.

Simon’s mother-in-law is ill and in the house where Jesus and his first four named disciples go at the end of the day. I imagine Jesus and the disciples are tired and ready for a meal and some peace. But peace rarely follows Jesus. As soon as he enters the house, the illness of Simon’s mother-in-law is made known (note: we never learn her name; only her relationship to Simon).

And Jesus, with compassion I imagine, goes to her, takes her by the hand and raises her up. Jesus raises her up as he will with others: Jairus’ daughter, Lazarus, the man at the pool of Bethesda and so on. Healing is an incredibly important part of the ministry of Jesus. Whether we know their names or only their relationship to another person, healing and restoring to their place in society is a lot of what Jesus is about.

So Jesus reaches out, raises up Simon’s mother-in-law and she is healed. She is restored to her place as one offering hospitality to her son-in-law and his friends, including Jesus. In response to the fever leaving her, she waits upon them. She offers them the gift of hospitality. She responds to the love and healing by doing what she can, as she can. And, as one of you suggested, having been healed by Jesus, she probably felt better than she had ever done before!

Word spreads and probably before Jesus knows what is going on, and that evening at sunset, he is now faced with all those who were sick or possessed. His ability to heal had quickly spread and now others expected him to heal them, will he or won’t he. The demands upon him were many. In Jewish tradition, a day starts with sunset. This may be the Gospel writer’s signal about this being the true beginning of Jesus’s public ministry. Jesus comes that we might have life and have it abundantly. Health and a place in society are part of our abundant life.

Jesus models for us another aspect of an abundant life. Prayer. Jesus goes, very early in the morning, to pray in a deserted place. We don’t know what Jesus prayed – our only indications of the substance of Jesus’s prayer life comes in the Garden of Gethsemane. We do know, though, that he regularly took himself away to pray. A time of reconnection with God. Prayer is central to Jesus’s life and it should be central to ours. Prayer is a time and a way for us to lay our

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

burdens down and to take up God's charge to us to love God and love neighbor. Prayer can help us set things in perspective. It doesn't have to be long or structured. Prayer is what you do when you call upon the one who made you and who is always present to you. Jesus knew this and took comfort from prayer. But he was never left alone too long.

Simon and the others hunted for him. They needed him as he needed them. They had a mission and it was to take them beyond and into Galilee. Jesus was called by God to proclaim the Good News: the kingdom of God has come near.

We have a role to play in proclaiming the Gospel in 2018. The Gospel- the Good News of Jesus the Christ, our Lord and Savior. In Jesus we can have life and have it abundantly. In Jesus we can find our center. Or, as stated in The Acts of the Apostles: "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). With Jesus at the center of our life, we can speak with confidence, we can look at each other and see what God has created, we can work for a life where everyone prospers because everyone is valued. We do not have to be afraid because we are never truly alone.

The prophet Isaiah shouts out what we should take into the way we approach each day:

Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
Has it not been told you from the beginning?  
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? ....

The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.  
He gives power to the faint,  
and strengthens the powerless.  
Even youths will faint and be weary,  
and the young will fall exhausted;  
but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.

Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.

When you hold Jesus close to your heart – or as some of us joked the other day: When Jesus is as important to you as your cell phone! then you are held up, close to God's heart, and all will be well. All will be well. **Amen.**