

Epiphany 6, 2009
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Mark 1: 40 -45

We continue in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 1. For Jesus it's just another day, another healing. And another curious command, as is so often the case early in this Gospel, we see Jesus heal a man then "sternly warn him, to say nothing to anyone."

Hmmm. Let's pray. The Lord be with you.
Lord Jesus in days of old you walked this earth, healing many who were sick and cleansing those possessed by any demon. You then died, to forgive us, and rose again on the 3rd day to save us. For all of your mercies Lord we give you thanks but most of all for that one which is salvation for us all—the cross, and the empty tomb. Lord Jesus it is in your name we pray, AMEN.

Every year at least once around about this time, I take a moment or two to make sure you know what the word Epiphany means. This is of course the season of Epiphany here in the church—you heard me say that in the announcements, it's in the bulletin insert, whatever else—the season of, Epiphany. Epiphany is a Greek word that simply means make known—as in, make known the Lord! Make it known to all the world that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, our Lord our Savior, make it clear, make it obvious, in all that you say and do and think and feel make it plain that Jesus Christ is master of all creation—and your master too. "Make known the Lord!"—that is the meaning of Epiphany, and that is our central theme this time of year, which is kind of ironic. Given the Gospel lesson today. Where Jesus specifically says, "Don't make me known. Don't make me known, don't tell anybody!"

Jesus has just healed a man of leprosy, which is as dreadful a disease as one can imagine. And in days of old, there were not only the physical effects of the disease, but the social ones too—see, nobody knew much about medicine then, or how diseases were spread, so if somebody had what looked like leprosy, they got kicked out of town immediately. Forbidden contact with family and friends, condemned to live in quarantined isolation out in the wilderness, a leper was like "the living dead." Literally. So for Jesus to heal this man, it's more than cleaning up his skin—it's giving him back his life! Which Jesus did, gladly, freely, here's your healing here's your life back!—now don't tell anybody. Don't make it known, don't tell anybody.

Why, well this happens a number of times early in Mark's Gospel. Jesus heals an individual—here's your healing here's your life back, now don't say anything—it's a good question. Why? Let me put it this way—there is one human being. One human being in the whole entire Gospel of Mark who is permitted to say "You are the Son of God! You are the One, Jesus, it's you!" One human being gets to make known the Lord so to speak, without being "sternly warned" by Jesus to stop. Who? Who gets to speak plainly about Jesus, when, and why? If you want, I'll hum the theme song to Jeopardy.

Ok. I'll tell you. It's in Mark chapter 15. Here's the passage, I'll read it for you: "At noon the whole country was covered with darkness, which lasted for three hours. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, My God My God why have you forsaken me? Then with a loud cry, Jesus died. And the Roman army officer who was standing there in front of the cross saw how Jesus died, and he said, Truly this man was the Son of God."

Who gets to speak plainly about Jesus? Who gets to identify Him as God's Son our Savior, and make Him known to anybody willing to listen? The one who's been to the cross, that's who. The one who is a witness to the Savior's death. When Jesus did what He came to do, dying on a cross for the forgiveness of all our sins. Not just healing someone's skin, but healing hearts and minds and families and communities, everywhere! Not just one guy's miracle, but the world's salvation! Not just waving suffering away with a word but enduring suffering. Undergoing suffering, undergoing death and the grave and coming out the other side, the winner, when Jesus did what He came to do. Dying and rising again for us all, for our salvation. Now you can talk. Now you can spread the word. Now you can make Him known, this is who God is and this is what God does—He loves us enough to die in our place, He loves us enough to open for us the way of everlasting life.

In the Gospel today, Jesus heals a man of leprosy and in effect says "Here. Here's your life back, take it. Take your life back." That's a great miracle, being given your life back—but it's not

the Good News of the Gospel, it's not what the Roman soldier saw there on the cross. The miracle we proclaim in Epiphany and always, the miracle of the cross and empty tomb is not when Jesus says Here, have your life back, take it and go. It's when He says Here, have my life. Take my life, I lay it down in your place, you take my life. Then you pick up your cross, and follow me.

We are not simply lepers who have been healed. We are that—we are that—sick with sin and isolated from one another, living in our own personal wilderness, we are like lepers who have been healed of our sin, and given back a chance at life and family and community. Happiness. But more than that. More than that, I haven't just been given a shot at my life again, I've been given a chance to live His. Christ in me and me in Christ, today, and forever. You too. You've been given His life to live, now and forever, and that's news worth talking about. That's a message, we can't help but make known to everyone, till the day He comes back for us at last. May that day come quickly, in the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.