

Sermon for Sunday, February 8, 2009

Fifth Sunday After Epiphany

By Tim Ljunggren

First Lesson **Isaiah 40:21-31**
Psalm **Psalm 147:1-12, 21**
Second Lesson **1 Corinthians 9:16-23**
Gospel **Mark 1:29-39**

We are a very busy people, aren't we?

We have no time. A drive down any main street in any town tells our story, doesn't it? McDonald's, Arby's, Burger King, Taco Bell, Wendy's...we live in a society of fast food, junk food. At home, microwaves promises us meals in minutes, and anything that's frozen, dried, or packaged is almost assured of success.

We are a people in a hurry.

We don't take time to cook, we can't slow down to eat, we no longer spend time together at the dinner table. We are a nation of instant gratification and fast relief.

It's not just meals we rush through: We rush through much of life as well, don't we? We not only want instant soup but instant success (or instant trillion dollar bailouts) and instant solutions to our many problems.

The people of Jesus' day were not very different from us. They, too, were impressed by miracle workers offering instant and lasting cures. They, too, looked for instant gratification and instant relief. No wonder they were drawn to Jesus; here was someone special, someone unique—a miracle worker, a healer, perhaps the solution to all of their many, many problems. Here was the one who could say the word and make it all better.

Jesus knew what the people thought of him.

All through Mark's gospel, Jesus seems to want to keep his identity a secret; we heard it today, didn't we? "...and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him."

What's going on here? Why doesn't Jesus want people to know who he is? Is he simply being modest?

The answer, of course, lies in how people saw him—a miracle worker, a healer, almost a magician. At the beginning of this earthly ministry, his acts reveal him as one with great power—he could reach out and heal someone instantly!

But miracles were only part of the story.

Jesus knew that those who labeled him as a miracle worker were missing the real meaning of life. Jesus commanded silence, not out of a false sense of modesty but out of the real need for the entire story to be told.

As we all know, death and resurrection were parts of the story, too.

To us, Jesus' silencing of the demons serves as a reminder. We, too, look for magical cures, miraculous answers, instant solutions.

The word points us towards the rest of the story.

To a world that wants a magician, Jesus comes not with illusions but with a cross. God offers not a hero but a savior, not magic tricks but victory over death. And when we crave fast food—junk food—Jesus offers us real food in the form of his body and blood, shed for us.

That's who Jesus is—our savior, the One who passed from life to death to life again for us, in order to bring us new life and new hope.

This is what's offered to us. It doesn't involve easy answers or instant solutions. Instead, it comes through struggle and pain, but ultimately leads to victory.

Come, then, and eat the meal that's offered us. Come, then, and recognize not a magician, but the One who hangs on a cross. Come, then, and be fed, for here is real food, real drink.

No instant solutions—just enough to give us life.

Amen. ...

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