

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany – 2025

Jeremiah 1:4-10, 17-19

1 Corinthians 12:31b—13:13

Luke 4:31-44

Jesus is summoned to Peter's house, Simon's house. Simon's mother-in-law is there and she is sick. The Greek verbiage for Simon's mother-in-law's condition is that she has a "great fire." This dear lady has a raging temperature caused by who-knows-what. In the ancient world, a raging fever is a life-threatening condition. When your family member, someone you love, is horribly sick you can't help but worry. You pray, you tend them as best you can, you search for a doctor, one who employs the medical arts with skill, and you pray. St. Luke doesn't tell us any of that. St. Luke has an eye for detail. Luke is a theologian. Behind St. Luke stands the Holy Spirit. Luke's Gospel account is inspired by God the Holy Spirit. This word is a treasure. This word has power. This word carries light. This word carries salvation. This word carries divine authority. "... no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

St. Luke has an eye for detail. This is how he begins his Gospel account of the life of Christ: "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:1-4). Here's a better, more emphatic translation: "...it seemed good to me also, after investigating from the beginning *every tradition carefully*, to compose *systematically* a narrative for your benefit..." (Luke 1:3). So get what St. Luke writes about Simon's mother-in-law: "And he [Jesus] stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them" (Luke 4:39). Why didn't Luke write, "... and the fever left her and she was wearing a pale green frock"? Why didn't Luke write, "... and the fever left her and her bed coverings were exceedingly damp from perspiration"? Or, "...and the fever left her and she was 57 years old?"

Jesus served her, rebuking the fever, healing her, delivering her from an oppressive force, delivering her from an unwelcome consequence of a fallen creation, and, once delivered, she got up and served those who were in her son-in-law's house. Do you think that that is just some boring detail to tramp right over on your way to the miraculous catch of fish in chapter five? The Lord served her, a death-threatening fever left her, and she then began to serve those around her. What is Luke telling you? How many of y'all believe that the Lord of heaven and earth serves you in this place? With His Word, with His death and resurrection, serves you with His body and blood, brings the fruit of His sacrifice to bear on you, forgiving you your sins, uplifting you with His holiness, providing you with the bread of life; how many of you believe that the Lord Christ serves *you* in this place much like He served Peter's mother-in-law? I believe that. Jesus said: "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Who is Jesus referring to if not you? "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27). Does that include us? When He said that, did He see us?

A treasure; His service to us is a treasure unlike any other. Do you believe that? Having received the Lord's service, what was Simon's mother-in-law inspired to do? "Freely you have received; freely give" (Matthew 10:8 NIV). "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (John 13:34). Do you know what all these passages have in common? What they have in common is the dynamic of God giving to us, and us, having received the wonder of His service, then behaving in a Christ-like way toward others. All of you are saved by grace, a free gift of God in the blood of Christ. Grace; wonder of wonders! Receiving something you don't deserve; and not just any-old-thing; you receive the favor of Almighty God. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). What a declaration! What comfort! What splendor! What joy comes from that reality! Do you know what comes next, biblically? "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

So, did God create the opportunity for Simon's mother-in-law to do the good work of serving those in her son-in-law's house after the Lord healed her? That a little biblical 2+2. Now... what about you? Are you *looking* for the good works that God prepared in advance for you to walk in? Do you suppose that it would be interesting, rewarding, satisfying for us *to* look? There's no doubt about it, God does it. He prepares good works for you. What a joy to do the things that God sets up for us to do – good things, blessed things, helpful things, consequential things, Christ-like things! We have stumbling blocks to that service. We have enemies who want us to stay focused on self, focused on serving self, swilling the foul brew of the self-obsessed culture. Have y'all spent any time in the gloomy haunts of sin? It leads to unhappiness, brokenness, trouble for you and others. Who's behind all that? Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and now we swill the devil's self-serving brew.

The word "rebuke" is used three times in our Gospel reading. Jesus unleashes the authority of His Word and He rebukes the demonic, He rebukes the fever. Jesus is preaching and teaching. Jesus brings the Good News of the in-breaking of kingdom of God. And He rebukes the demonic. He tumbles their lame house. He casts them out. The people are amazed. "What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!" (Luke 4:36). St. Luke, the man with an eye for detail, the astute story-teller, the theologian, the catechist, he tells you what the crowd is asking to get you to ask, and answer, the same question. What is this word? St. Paul wrote this: "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). And again: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith'" (Romans 1:16-17).

It wasn't raw, naked, divine power that subdued the demonic (John 12:31). When Christ spoke His word it was a bloody word, a word that was connected, tethered to His cross, His sacrifice, His death and His resurrection. He triumphs over the demonic by laying down His life (Colossians 2:15). He made a public spectacle of His demonic enemies not by delivering a right cross, but by enduring the darkness of the devil, by enduring the assaults of evil men, by

enduring the wretched sin that we have committed, by enduring the Father's rage against our sin, by paying the price of our redemption with His holy blood, the life-blood of His fully human body. *That's* how Christ triumphs over the demonic!

The Son of God sacrificed Himself on the holy cross and that sacrifice is embedded in the Word you hear. *That's* what this word is (Ο λόγος του σταυρου). The word of the gospel sets you free (John 8:32). Forgiven and loved, forgiven and treasured, forgiven and set free, this church is very much like Simon's house and you are very much like Simon's mother-in-law. We will not give the devil a foothold (Ephesians 4:27). We will not absent ourselves from Christ's service (Hebrews 10:25). We will not live for self (Philippians 2:4). Christ's authority is in this place (Matthew 28:18-20). His Word is unleashed and we hearken to it (John 10:3-4). This divine Word is at work among us (1 Thessalonians 2:13). That is wonderful. It is a joy to hear it. It is a joy to live according to it. It is exactly what being a follower of Christ is all about. To Him be glory forever and ever.