

Epiphany 5 Year B  
Feb. 4, 2018  
St. James, Wheat Ridge

By the Rev. Becky Jones

Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever,  
which in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine was a lot more serious than it is today.  
Lacking access to our fever-reducing 21<sup>st</sup> century medicines,  
fevers at that time often were fatal.  
We can presume that the woman knew that,  
and may well have been preparing for her own death.

They told Jesus about her,  
and he came  
and took her by the hand and lifted her up.

Then the fever left her,  
and she began to serve them.

Mark doesn't tell us what, if anything, Jesus said to the woman,  
or what she said to him.  
Mark doesn't even tell us her name.  
But I can imagine the conversation that might have taken place, can't you?

I can imagine Jesus walking up to the bed  
where the woman lay helplessly,  
taking hold of her hand and saying,  
"Get up, old girl!  
You're not dead yet!  
Get up, because there is work to be done!"

And I can imagine the woman responding,  
"Uh ... okay. I'm up.  
I guess I'm not gonna die after all.  
Let me just go see what needs doing."

Now, in our gospel story,  
this incident happens between an older woman and our Savior.  
But as I said, we never learn her name.

I think Mark left her unnamed on purposed.  
 Because, you know what?  
 I think Jesus might just as well have been speaking to this church.

“Get up, Saint James, old girl!  
 You’re not dead yet!  
 Get up, because there is work to be done.”

And we, the people of Saint James respond,  
 “Well look at us. We aren’t dead after all.  
 Let’s just go see what needs doing.”

If you were at our Annual Meeting last Sunday,  
 you heard the various reports given about the health of our parish  
 It was not so very long ago that the death of St. James seemed imminent.  
 It seemed we were too small to be sustainable.  
 We were too old to be sustainable.  
 There seemed to be no future here,  
 other than a steady decline until we passively succumbed to death.

And yet ...  
 Here we are.  
 Our attendance is up 30 % over last year;  
 our pledges are up.  
 We’re not yet operating fully in the black  
 but we’re on a trajectory to financial sustainability.

We got up and we started looking around to see what needed doing.  
 We found homeless people we could feed.  
 We found sick people we could minister to.  
 We found children right here in our neighborhood we could love and nurture  
 and bring joy to.

We started sprucing up the place.  
 We started singing – joyfully!  
 We started cleaning and clearing out and painting.  
 We started throwing parties and inviting in the neighbors!  
 We started living like what we did mattered.  
 We started finding energy and strength  
 that was lacking before.

We stopped focusing so much on the past,  
because now we seem to have a future  
that looks pretty interesting and inviting.  
And there is so much more for us to do!

What happened?

You know, long, long ago,  
long before Jesus,  
the people of Israel were, figuratively speaking,  
lying on their deathbed too.  
They'd had a glorious past, a past they longed for.  
But their present was pretty bleak.  
Their best and brightest had been carried off into exile,  
and those left behind just weren't capable  
of keeping the place going.  
Year after year after year went by,  
and Jerusalem fell into greater and greater ruin.

Eventually, the Israelites who had been carried off into captivity  
would return.  
But it would be a long, difficult journey.  
And time after time their faith would be tested.  
For them, it wasn't as simple as grasping our Lord's hand  
and immediately being restored.  
No, their journey took very long time,  
and there were times they grew very tired of waiting.

The prophets had to keep reminding them  
that they needed to trust.  
The prophets needed to remind them  
that God alone is sovereign,  
and that those who turn to the Lord  
will find their strength replenished.  
They will not be disappointed.  
They needed someone to say to them,  
"Get up, Israel, old girl!  
You're not dead yet!  
Get up because there's work to be done!"

In some of the most beautiful words in all of Holy Scripture,  
the prophet Isaiah reminds them  
that those who wait for the Lord  
shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.  
So get up, and get going.

And Mother Church – Saint James –  
will keep on rising from the dead,  
if we just keep on getting up  
and looking around for what needs doing.  
If we believe,  
if we're faithful,  
we know that the ancient truth remains,  
and resurrection is always emerging from death.  
Life always awaits those  
who allow Jesus to take them by the hand.

That healing may require plenty of work,  
plenty of "getting up"  
when we might rather stay lying down.

But there is our Lord's hand, reaching out to us.  
There is healing power in that hand.  
There is strength in that hand.  
There is energy in that hand.  
There is life in that hand.  
Praise God, that hand has ahold of us now.

"Get up, St. James, old girl!  
You're not dead yet!  
Get up, because there is work to be done."

Amen.