

THEY BROUGHT TO HIM ALL WHO WERE SICK OR OPPRESSED BY DEMONS. AND THE WHOLE CITY WAS GATHERED TOGETHER AT THE DOOR. AND HE HEALED MANY WHO WERE SICK WITH VARIOUS DISEASES, AND CAST OUT MANY DEMONS.

Just when I thought I had life all figured out, came the unsettling headline from this past week, "Intense jogging may shorten life span, study shows," and this from the Journal of the American College of Cardiology, no less. Ouch, talk about your pothole in my yellow brick road.

I suppose I should point out that the study revolved around that word "intense." The study, and I suppose skeptics would say this was just one study, showed that those who ran fast for a total of more than 4 hours a week were just as likely to die as your average couch potato. The study did show, however, that those who jogged at a snail's pace for less than 2 1/2 hours a week did have a 30% lower risk of death. The point of the study is that more is not necessarily better, which is good news for a guy like me, who runs much more like the turtle than the hare.

I only point this out to you because it shows merely one of the lengths we go to to extend life and lower our risk of mortality. We seek every advantage we can get. We wear our seatbelts, get 8-hours of sleep a night, eat our oatmeal, fruits and vegetables, exercise, and ... AND, in spite of everything we do, we find ourselves like those gathered together at the door of Peter's home. The residents of Capernaum had gathered there because in one form or another they were sick and they could do nothing about it. They were helpless.

My words are not meant to be cynical, or encourage unwise stewardship of your body and life, but I speak the truth in love: our lives are

cursed by sin. In our sin, we are attracted to any number of things that offer us the escape from mortality; that appeal to us to remove the curse of sin from our bodies and lives. But, there is only one thing that grants healing from sin and death. Today, WE LEARN TO LOOK TO JESUS FOR THE HEALING THAT HE GIVES.

As mortal sinners in a world cursed by sin, we know all too well the misery of sin in the evil of this present age, as well as in the darkness of our hearts. God intended our bodies to last forever, but they wear out, our health fails, and pain is our constant companion.

Misery is part and parcel of the world we live in. Scripture teaches us that misery afflicts our earthly lives because of sin. No, God is not punishing for our sins; He does not punish us for being sinners. Our bodies and our lives are made miserable because the world in which we live is cursed by sin. The Bible teaches that sin entered into the world and death by sin. Scripture teaches that corruption, decay, disease, demons are the fruit growing from one root and that is sin, rebellion against God. The question before us this Sunday is: Where do you look for healing in the misery and suffering, pain and loss of earthly life?

In His earthly ministry, the Great Physician raised Lazarus from the grave, the widow's son at Nain, and Jairus' daughter. He healed Peter's mother-in-law, made the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk. But, have you ever thought about this: What happened to them?

The honest answer -- they died. The healing, even the raising from the dead that Jesus gave in His earthly ministry, was temporary. We are all going to die, just like Peter's mother-in-law, all those healed that night, Lazarus, the widow of Nain's son, and Jairus' daughter. The reality that confronts us all is that we are all going to end up in the grave. That is

because we are all born sinful and unclean and the wages of sin is death.

II. In this season of Epiphany, we rejoice that God has appeared to us in Jesus of Nazareth. Into this darkness of the valley of the shadow of death, Jesus came to be our Light. Jesus did not just come to this earth to take care of a fever here and there, or a few diseases and illnesses. No, Jesus came to this earth, born of Virgin Mother, to remove the curse of sin and its wages of death.

Listen to what Jesus says, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16).” “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live...Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out (Jn 5:25, 28).” “I am the resurrection and the life. Who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die (Jn 11:25-26).”

Yes, the Great Physician gives healing to Peter’s mother-in-law and to the people of Capernaum in our lesson. But, let us never take our eyes off of the healing that Jesus gives for all eternity. Jesus teaches and we confess His teaching in the Creed, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” All that we confess in the Creed is yours – the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting because the Great Physician won it for you on Calvary’s cross. For us, in our place, He took upon His own body all the miseries of earthly life, and through His life, through His suffering and death, He atoned and made satisfaction for our sin. Through Christ, we are forgiven, freed and delivered from all bondage of sin, and of death, and the grave. And

the 3rd day, He rose again for you, bringing life and immortality to light through the Gospel. He lives to give you the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting at the font of Baptism, His Table where He serves you His body and blood, and from the pulpit where you hear God's Word. Through these means, God makes all the gifts Christ won for you your very own.

I point this out to you, Dear Child of God, because the day is coming, when you will breath your last, your eternal soul will depart your mortal body, you will be laid in a casket and buried. But, the day is also coming when Jesus will come again in all of His glory. You will hear His voice calling you from the grave, and you will rise with a glorified body, free from sin, from death, from decay, from pain and infirmity, and, in the paradise of heaven in body and soul together, you will live with Jesus, never to deal again with the common cold, cancer, Alzheimer's, MS, Lou Gering's disease, IVs, surgeries, chemotherapy, doctor's visits, and death again.

But, between now and then, today and the great day Jesus comes again in glory, people will get sick, very sick. When that happens, we pray, as Jesus Himself teaches us to do, that the Great Physician will bring healing and maybe He will, and life with our loved one, our friend, and neighbor will go on, in joy and happiness together. Or maybe, He won't. And, infirmity, and pain, and finally death will come. And, sadness and tears will come. And, we will have to say good-bye on this side of heaven.

But, even then, Jesus gives healing, healing from the final disease of death itself. The Good News of the Christian faith is that we have Jesus. And when we have Jesus, we have the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting that Jesus gives.

My Fellow Redeemed in Christ, please remember that every time

Jesus healed someone sick, He was showing us what eternal life in heaven would be like -- free from sin and all its vile consequences for our bodies and our lives. In heaven, God will wipe all the tears from our eyes.

But, as we walk by faith, God may call upon us to carry a cross. Faith sees Christ in suffering and continues to trust the suffering Christ. When we call upon God, He may remove the cross from our life. Or in His mercy, He will give us strength to bear our crosses. If it be the Lord's will that we suffer in the flesh, we rejoice in Jesus. For when we are in Christ, no suffering of this earth can harm and consume us, and no death can kill us; for we conquer all because of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. In the words of Isaiah, "They 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."