

Epiphany 5B. February 4, 2018. Dungeness Valley Lutheran Church, Sequim, WA. Isaiah 40:21-31; I Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39. “Grasshoppers and Eagles”

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. ³² That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. ³⁵ In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷When they found him, they said to him, ‘Everyone is searching for you.’ ³⁸He answered, ‘Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.’ ³⁹And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

The whole city was gathered around the door of Peter’s house in Capernaum. People were sick and wanted healing. The whole city! The whole city – and then some – lined up at the doors of the two pharmacies in Williamson, W. Va., a town of 3,200 people, to buy, in the last ten years, nearly 21 million opioid pain killers. The whole city – or so it seems – lines up at our door to get first dibs at the garage sale or the holiday bazaar.

The whole city – indeed the whole world’s refugees -- gather around doors, seeking shelter, food, protection, and entry into a place that would welcome them. And we turn so many away. Even here in sunny Sequim, people line up for food, get their names on years-long lists for affordable housing, and stand in line at the door of the warming center on really cold days.

And those are only the people we see. Many more live quietly out of sight. Waiting, searching.

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Jesus got up early and went in the dark to a deserted place to pray. The people of the city troubled him. He poured out his heart’s worries about the people he loved: the rookie disciples, the physically and mentally ill. He probably gave thanks for the ability to heal. Perhaps he was seeking his Father’s direction. He took the time to rest and to listen.

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Peter and the others found Jesus and confronted him, “Everyone is searching for you.” Come on, Jesus, you’ve got momentum. You’ve won the first primary. Let’s get moving!

Jesus HAS won the first primary. But did you ever know a politician who, after such success, would withdraw to a deserted place to pray rather than rushing on to the next city? Jesus is no politician. He does not want fame; he acquires no fortune. He is a humble healer and a prayerful prophet. He will move on, but not just yet.

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Everyone is searching for you, Jesus. Ever notice when someone says “everyone” is doing or saying something, they mean that they themselves are doing or saying that? “Everyone says the coffee is too strong,” means “I” think the coffee’s too strong. What Peter might well have meant was, “I am searching for you, Jesus.”

And Peter, as he so often does, speaks for us. “I am searching for you, Jesus, because I am not sure what to do next. Which direction to give priority. How to solve a particular problem. How to deal with my illness or worry or prosperity or homework or the kids at school or, or, or....”

We’re all torn. God’s mending tape is available. Look at the bulletin cover and visualize Jesus lifting you up. Pray silently for the divine guidance you need.

PAUSE

Amen.

Jesus models the life of prayer: a practice that can help open our ears to God’s will for us. “But when?” we ask. Early in the morning at a specific time in a quiet place? At every red light? At every mealtime? While driving through the school zone at the painfully slow 20 mph: well, it’s a good time to pray for the kids in that school. I have a fair amount of time in the car most days: time to pray, think about what God calls for today. But I don’t always do this...I like to listen to the news – of course there’s plenty to pray about when listening to the stories of today’s grasshoppers.

When I was a little kid, our school playground included an open lot with a lot of tall grass and weeds. We’d walk or run through the grass and the grasshoppers would jump out at us at all angles. Random. Unfocused. Scared of the monster kids running through their field. In our first reading this morning, Isaiah compared us to grasshoppers! How God blows on the princes and rulers and they scatter like stubble?! Isaiah was talking to people who felt powerless and weary, who had

been living in an alien land, people who longed to go home, but wondered whether there would be a home to return to – much like millions of refugees today. And like many of us today – not homeless, but yet unrooted. He calls people in need of focus and meaning “grasshoppers”.

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Look around you at church this morning. There is someone here with a fast-paced and stressful schedule who longs for rest. There is someone waiting for a diagnosis and is worried. There is someone whose increasing age brings aches and weariness. There is someone who doesn’t want to go to work or school tomorrow. There is someone who worries about a grandchild whose parents don’t bring her to church. There is someone who longs for a friend to spend the afternoon with. Everyone is searching for you, Jesus.

Take a moment now to pray for someone you see here today. Learn his or her name later if you don’t know it now. Visualize that person being lifted up like Peter’s mother on our bulletin cover.

PAUSE

Amen.

Everyone is searching for you, Jesus.

And Jesus is here for everyone this morning. He showed us by his life that our healing and wholeness are important to God. Healing is not always recovering from a sickness or solving a problem or overcoming a worry. Healing is finding peace NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS. Sometimes we find peace in a wheelchair or at an empty kitchen table or in the chaos of too many people under one roof. It is not easy, but giving up our personal demand for what WE want may be the beginning of openness to healing, the beginning of openness to the needs OF others and to outreach FROM others.

Everyone is searching for you, Jesus. And that Jesus is among us right HERE, right NOW. Here to touch us through the hands and the prayers of the others here today. Here to feed you himself with holy bread and a sip of wine. The words you hear in the readings and the sermon and benediction are Jesus’ words to you. The praying people here, the Word, and Holy Communion sustain us from Sunday through Monday to Saturday, week in, week out. Year in, year out. Our whole lives long.

I wish with all my heart that we could say, “The whole city is gathered around our door.” And not just for good deals with furniture or lovely holiday crafts, but for the three-fold gift the church offers: Word, a community of people, and the holy meal Jesus offers and commands: DO this in remembrance of me.

Isaiah talked about grasshoppers: people with spiritual hunger who mask it with what we think will feed us: the worldly treasures of money, power, success, self-discipline, personal strength, painkillers. And he also talked about people who “wait for the Lord.” He says in that waiting for the soul-treasures, God will renew our spiritual strength so that we fly with wings like eagles, run without weariness, walk without fainting!

Everyone is searching for you, Jesus. And we wait for your healing wholeness: your soul-treasure gift of grace. Your words of forgiveness and kind encouragement.

Everyone is searching for you, Jesus. Thank you for being here with us today and every day. Amen.