

**Sermon – Year B Epiphany 5**  
**Rev. Karen Joy Kelly**  
**Sunday, February 4, 2024**  
**Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law**  
**Isaiah 40.21-31; Psalm 147.1-12, 21c; 1 Corinthians 9.16-23; Mark 1.29-39**

How comforted I always am by the words from Isaiah. Whenever I need words of assurance, I know I can find them in this book of the Old Testament that bears the Prophet's name. This morning his words are full of passion ... "Have you not known? Have you not heard?" It was his way of reassuring those captives of Babylon that they are there for only a brief time, before they are to return to their beloved Jerusalem.

Our Psalm echoes this promise of Isaiah in a "Praise to the Lord" response to this good news.

Paul provides for us methods for reaching others ... and while it may sound chameleon-like, I think he's telling us to begin our journey with others where they are, so that they feel comfortable as they may begin their spiritual journeys. (I heard a presentation Hospice on their music therapy program that is a good analogy of what Paul is trying to tell us. Whenever the music therapist is present with one who is high-strung, she begins her music at that level, rather than the opposite. Thus, the person feels heard. Eventually the therapist brings down the energy ... but very slowly ... so the patient can adjust comfortably to the change in pace and mood.)#

And then we come to the story of Jesus and his healing and casting out demons. We hear how he rested, how he took time to be alone with God, and then how he and his waiting disciples continued in their ministry.

With that in mind, I have two stories to share with you this morning.

When I read what this week's gospel was about it brought a smile to my face on Monday morning and brought back fond memories of my first parish as a rector.

When at St. Peter's in Altavista, Virginia, we started a Daughters of the King Chapter. Following three months of prayer and discernment it was time to name our chapter. As we met after reading this morning's gospel that Sunday, it became very obvious to us that the Holy Spirit was calling us to name our chapter after St. Peter's mother-in-law. What a beautiful testimony to the Daughters of the King. As Jesus held out his hand to this woman who had taken ill, she accepted it. As she did, her fever left her. And, she proceeded to get up and serve. Much like the Daughters who are charged with constant prayer, study, evangelism and service ... through doing God's work in the world. We did a quick search for her proper

name but could not find it. After a fruitless search we chose to stick with St. Peter's mother-in-law chapter of the Daughters of the King. While the name raised eyebrows among our sister chapters when we attended our first diocesan meeting we remained committed to it. One of the officers even, ever so subtly, volunteered to help us find that name. Yet, even after researching her name from Lynchburg, VA to Jerusalem, it has never been revealed. On the other hand, we figured that it is a name that is not easy to forget in the long list of names for chapters throughout the world (generally Martha or Mary). And, as an aside, this is the same process we went through as we named our own chapter here at St. Paul's, the Garden of Saints Chapter.) St. Peter's mother-in-law was a woman who represented that to which we aspire as Daughters. She is a beautiful example of how we are all called to be ... and I expect that in her healing experience, her eyes were opened to the realities of just who Jesus was and how she, because of him, was called to serve. Just like the Daughters of the King.#

As for the second story, some of it will resonate because of our growing relationship with our brothers and sisters at Sudanese Grace in Grand Rapids and from the reading of the book "What they meant for evil" by Rebecca Deng. The story you are about to hear is yet another one of those miracles.

It is a story from a different voice of the horrific experience in war-torn Sudan. It is the story of a young man who spent his childhood among demons. Emmanuel Jal is a rapper who now tours the world and works with others for peace.

Emmanuel's father was with the police force eventually joined the rebel army in an attempt to rid his country of dictators. Emmanuel, as a child, under age seven, saw his aunt raped, his mother despondent, the burning of his village. He and his father were the only survivors of his family and were separated from one another at one point. Emmanuel, by then on his own, was sent out as a "war child" to join the army. Imagine, an 8 year old soldier. Emmanuel was full of hate and eager to kill any Muslim or Arab he came across. He told us that his gun was his best friend.

At some point he and his young friends found themselves free and wandered in the desert starving, and/or stealing chickens or goats whenever they could for survival. He raps that "he did wrong to become strong". He also wondered why he was still alive. He asked what meaning his life had.

And then Jesus spoke to him somehow and he knew. He was saved by Emma McCune, a young English woman, who ended up saving about 150 of these warrior children.

"I'm alive and I'm to thrive!" he raps.

Now Emmanuel, healed from his demons, realized that it was not Arabs or Muslims who were evil, but it was their leaders who abused religion to gain power.

He now dances and raps with Arabs and one of his films was sponsored by a Muslim organization. He co-starred in a 2014 movie produced by Ron Howard and starring Reese Witherspoon entitled *The Good Lie*, which is the story of war-torn Sudan. He continues with a powerful message. He preaches peace.

He knows that education will save his people. He founded an organization called GUA Africa that builds schools, provides scholarships for Sudanese war survivors in refugee camps and sponsors education for children in the most deprived slum areas in Nairobi. His *lose to win* is a campaign that he started and was the beginning of GUA Africa. For him it meant going back to only one meal a day (which is the norm in Africa), giving up his home and living as a modern-day nomad for the duration of the challenge. He completed a 661 day fast that ran from December 2008 to October 2010 and used the money he would have spent on the other two meals and monies raised from others to support this cause. The first school built was named the Emma Academy. #

Yes, in both of these stories,

Illness is healed.

Demons are removed.

And life goes on, changed for many for the good. #

We now find ourselves on the edge of a new way of life. Having lived through the pandemic and even continuing to be plagued by COVID and seeking to steady ourselves for the upcoming-elections, being respectful to persons of all different persuasions. It is time to begin to put into effect that which we have learned that will help bring about that Good News that Jesus was so eager to share with neighboring communities.

Lent is on the horizon. It is our time to re-align ourselves with God's will for our lives.

How might these good news stories from scripture and real life form your Lenten disciplines? Emmanuel urges us all to choose to help someone else as we journey in discipleship with the one who loved us enough to give up his life.

Like St. Peter's mother-in-law we, too, are in need of healing. We, too, can accept Jesus' hand, be made whole to rise and serve. We are called to deepen our own commitment to God and the establishment of God's kingdom here. We can also consider being like Emmanuel ... we can "lose to win" ... giving up something of value to us and use what money we would have spent to the betterment of the world around us as we focus on kingdom-building right here, right now.

One final thought ... please note that Jesus continued through all the towns and villages in the area to spread the word. During this Lenten season, please consider where out beyond these doors you might begin to build relationships and

share the Good News and become more involved in creating The Beloved Community.

How might you be transformed, and through that transformation impact the lives of just even one other person so that on Easter morn, you will feel in your own heart the difference you have made when together we shout “Halleluiah, the Lord is risen, the Lord is risen indeed? And, then, go out into the community and share your gifts of healing in the way the Spirit has shown you just Jesus did.