

**Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL**  
Pastor Troy Schreiner      www.victorylutheran.org

**Worship Series: *From the River to the Mountain***

**Service Theme: *The Devil's Work Undone***

**Sermon Theme: *Undoing the Devil's Work***

**February 4, 2024— Mark 1:29-39**

When Greg Thomas walked his dogs near his home in rural Minnesota, he always passed a run down, old church. Each time, he'd sit on the church's crumbling steps, pray, and then continue his walk. One day, after experiencing excruciating headaches, earaches, and jaw aches for nearly a year, Greg went to the doctor, where medical scans revealed heartbreaking news: Advanced, inoperable cancer had spread so far throughout his head and neck that the doctor told Greg and his family to start planning his funeral.

After the grim diagnosis, Greg again found himself on the steps of that dilapidated church, pouring his heart out to God. Observing the shoddy condition of the church, he thought, ***"Before I leave this earth, Lord, I'd like to do something for you."*** He made a deal with the owners of the church that he would spend his remaining days repairing and restoring it if they gave him a key so he could worship and pray there whenever he wanted.

But while Greg worked to repair and strengthen the old church, he started feeling stronger himself. At his next check-up, the scans revealed incredibly that Greg's tumors were shrinking! And they kept shrinking, until they disappeared entirely. Now, Greg is officially in remission, and no longer needs even follow-up appointments. About his incredible healing, Greg said, ***"While I restored that church, God was restoring me."***

It's a heartwarming, powerful, miraculous story! But it's not unique. There are literally thousands of accounts about people-- maybe even you, or someone you know—who've been diagnosed with serious, deadly illnesses but were healed in ways that even doctors can only explain as miraculous.

Just like the accounts before us in Mark's Gospel this morning. Once again, we find ourselves in Capernaum, where Jesus taught with authority and drove out a demon in the synagogue, which Pastor Phil preached about last Sunday. That same day, ***"As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her."***

The urgency with which they tell Jesus about Peter's mother-in-law suggests she didn't just have the sniffles. It might have even been touch and go whether she'd make it! But they went to the right person. ***"[Jesus] went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them."*** With just a touch of Jesus' hand, her fever immediately disappears. Not sweating out her fever overnight and getting back on her feet after a couple days bedrest. Boom! Immediately, she's back on her feet, feeling so strong, and so appreciative, that she immediately begins taking care of her house guests. Even doctors could only explain this as miraculous.

But this wouldn't be a quaint, quiet night of exchanging pleasantries, because word gets around quickly! Between Jesus' authoritative morning in their synagogue, and now Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law, news about Jesus spread through Capernaum like wildfire. As good Israelites, they waited until sunset, when the Sabbath Day with its regulations and restrictions ended. But as soon as the sun descended, the townspeople descended on Jesus. ***"The people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was."***

You can't help but marvel at this incredible scene! Picture the pleading, desperate crowd gathered around Peter's front door -- the sick, the broken, the dying, the demon-possessed, and their loved ones who'd brought, carried, or dragged them there. Each one a witness of Jesus' compassion and power as he laid his hands on the sick and healed them, and commanded demons to vacate their hosts. Hear their

joyful cries spreading one by one as Jesus worked his way through the crowd! “I’m healed!” “The pain is gone!” “I can speak!” “I can see!” “I can walk!” “I’m free!” “Thank you, Lord!” Even doctors could only explain such healings as miraculous!

But Jesus’ miraculous healings had a greater purpose than an impressive sideshow to get people talking. They reveal what Jesus came to do; namely, as our theme states, to undo the devil’s work! Because that’s what things like pain, disease, demon possession, and death are—the devil’s work.

To understand why, we have to time travel back to the beginning. God had created everything in the world, including mankind, entirely perfect. Therefore, things like pain, disease, and demon possession were completely unknown. But after Satan, one of God’s angels, was defeated in his attempt to wrest power from God, he was cast out of heaven and eternally condemned. From that point forward, his one desire is to inflict as much pain, suffering, and destruction on God’s people as possible.

You probably know the rest of the account. Satan succeeded in tempting Adam and Eve, the people God created, to believe that they’d be happier and more fulfilled chasing their own desires, rather than following God’s loving direction. And because mankind made God’s perfect creation imperfect, we live in a world where the curse of sin makes things like pain, disease, demon possession and death a part of our reality. A fallout of the devil’s work.

By healing the sick, erasing pain, and driving out demons, Jesus displays his power over Satan, reveals himself as the Son of God, and shows us that he’d come to undo the devil’s work—to reverse and erase the consequences of sin that Satan brought into the world and our lives!

But while these accounts of Jesus’ miraculous healings are incredible, important, and impactful, you might hear them with a tinge of sadness; disappointment; even annoyance. Because for every Peter’s mother-in-law who had her fever erased and got back on her feet through Jesus,

there are plenty of others—maybe your mother or mother-in-law—who got sick, but never got out of bed again. For every Greg Thomas who saw his tumors miraculously disappear, there are plenty of others who have watched their lives and vitality disappear from cancer that never went away. For every person in that crowd who got back the use of their voice, legs, eyes, or ears, there are plenty of others who live out their lives with debilitating disabilities. For every person from whom Jesus evicted a demon, there are plenty of others whose sinful habits and destructive addictions seem to have taken up permanent residence. As we watch Jesus undo the devil’s work here, maybe we’re left questioning, “Why doesn’t he do that for me?” “Why didn’t he do that for my loved one?”

It’s not because God doesn’t have the power to. Jesus’ miracles recorded throughout Scripture make that clear. That means if God doesn’t miraculously heal someone, it’s because he has another purpose for it. Because Satan wants to inflict as much pain on God’s people as possible, he’ll try to convince you that God didn’t heal you or your loved one because he hasn’t forgiven you or them, or that he doesn’t love or care about you, or that God’s just an illusion that weak people turn to to find hope in a hopeless world.

Which reveals the ultimate work Satan is trying to accomplish. Yes, Satan hurts us by inflicting pain, suffering, and sadness in this sin-cursed world. But he wants to do so much more than just make you hurt. Satan hates you, like he hates the one to whom you belong. He doesn’t just want to hurt you. He wants to destroy you! Just like the Apostle Peter warns, ***“Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”***

That’s a powerful image of the ultimate purpose of Satan’s work, isn’t it? When a lion prowls around the African savannah, it springs from its hiding place and sinks its teeth into an unsuspecting antelope, not just to make it hurt. But to destroy it; to devour it. That’s exactly what Satan wants to do to every one of us. He wants to destroy you! He does that work by trying to rip you away from Jesus, through whatever

means he can. Even by filling your head with his lies while you experience pain, suffering, or disease.

Satan wants to destroy you, not just make you hurt. So, for the devil's ultimate work to be undone, Jesus' work needed to be more than just healing people of physical diseases or disabilities. That's why, after the previous day of miraculous healing glory, Jesus went off by himself before sunrise to pray to his Father. And to no one's surprise, when the sun came up the next morning, more people with more diseases and disabilities showed up, searching for the healer. When Jesus disciples finally found him, they exclaimed, ***"Everyone is looking for you!"*** as if to say, "What are you doing out here? You've got work to do!" But Jesus replied, ***"Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also."***

If Jesus only came to heal people of physical pain and suffering, he could have set up shop in Capernaum, and people would've flocked to him from all over the world to be healed. But that's not why he came. Jesus' miraculous healings pointed to the ultimate purpose for which he came: to undo the devil's ultimate work. Jesus did that by teaching and proclaiming to people far and wide the good news that he had come to be the Savior of the world; to heal the world from the deadliest disease of sin! As he told his disciples, ***"That is why I have come."***

To save someone from a snake, you have to do more than just offer a bandage and antibiotic cream after it bites. That might ease the pain, but it won't prevent the snake from biting again. To save someone from the snake, you need to crush its head. That's just what God promised Jesus would come to do, in order to undo the Devil's work once and for all! Immediately after Satan tempted Adam and Eve to plunge the world into sin, God promised a Savior for the world, warning Satan, ***"He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."***

The serpent struck the Savior's heel as Jesus suffered the punishment of Hell on the cross. But when Jesus died and rose from the dead 3 days later, he crushed the serpent's head into the dust. By winning the

world's salvation, Jesus has taxidermied that prowling lion, and mounted his head on the wall! By means of the most bitter pain and suffering imaginable, Jesus has eternally undone the devil's work!

That means if Jesus doesn't grant you miraculous healing, he has a purpose for your sickness, weakness, or suffering that he will use to undo the devil's work!

Maybe God allows it to shake the fragile earthly foundations people try to build their lives on, so they'll see their need to build on the only unshakeable foundation of Christ. Maybe God uses that sickness to draw us closer to him, as we pour our hearts out to him in prayer during those days of trouble, leaning more firmly on his promises. Maybe your suffering is an opportunity God gives you to witness to his power and presence to everyone around you, who see your perseverance by faith, even in circumstances that would make others crumble. Maybe that pain causes us to look with eager anticipation to heaven, where pain and sorrow will once again be completely unknown. Maybe that sickness is the means God uses to call us home to heaven and save us eternally. Whatever God's reason, he will use it to undo the devil's work in your life.

If you or your loved one is currently suffering, think about this. How many of the crowd outside Peter's house that evening would have witnessed Jesus' power and compassion, and heard the gospel he proclaimed if God hadn't allowed them or their loved ones to struggle with disease or disability? Whether God gives you miraculous healing like Peter's mother-in-law, or the Capernaum crowds, or like Greg Thomas, or whether he doesn't, you can have peace and confidence that Jesus is using that, and all things, so that the devil's work is undone. Both in this life and the next. ***"Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."*** Miraculous, right?