

**Mark 1:29-39**

We sometimes complain about life not being fair. “Her cookie is bigger than mine!” “Why didn’t he get punished too?” “His boss paid out bigger bonuses than mine did.” It’s probably a good thing that Job didn’t know Simon Peter’s mother-in-law. She only had a fever, and Jesus healed her instantly. Poor Job suffered for ages in misery and sorrow. Perhaps God isn’t fair. He could have healed Job quickly, too, but He didn’t. He could have allowed Peter’s mother-in-law to suffer a while, but He didn’t.

Have you ever wondered why God allowed some misery to come to you? Perhaps you’re enduring an illness right now. Why doesn’t God remove it? Why does He permit suffering to continue...and sometimes for so long? We don’t know the mind of God except for what He has revealed to us about Himself in Jesus Christ. And in Christ we see that, no, God is not fair. He punished His innocent Son for our wrongs. He determined that Jesus should suffer hell for our sins. What’s fair about that?

Not one of us truly knows what it means to suffer—really suffer. We think we do. And certainly we endure sufferings and sorrows of many kinds. But we have not suffered the agony of God’s anger—nor will we, who belong to Christ, ever. Not that we don’t deserve it, we do—all of us—every bit of it. But Jesus took the wrath of God away from us to Himself as He hung on the cross. That’s real suffering. Not even Job could understand that kind of misery—and he was miserable. His skin was scabbed, with worms, broken and festering. Physical suffering, emotional, even mental—psychological, this we endure at different times through life—but not the spiritual torment of God’s fiery anger. Jesus endured all of it in your place.

Knowing this, believing this, let’s look closer at our Gospel reading for today in Mark 1. Let’s go to Capernaum to the house of Simon Peter. His mother-in-law is lying in bed with a high fever. They tell Jesus about her. He comes to her, takes her by the hand, lifts her up, and the fever leaves her...and I have a question for you—where did it go? Where did the fever go? Did it disappear? Did it vanish into thin air? That evening the whole town gathered at the door. Jesus healed many who were sick and possessed, and I ask you, where did all of those diseases go?

The prophet Isaiah gives us the answer, in chapter 53, “Surely our sicknesses He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.” Where did her fever go? It went on Jesus. Where did the leper’s leprosy go? Jesus took it. Just as He took the cripple’s palsy, and the blind man’s blindness, and the death of Lazarus. Our sickness, our disease, Jesus carried. Our sorrow, our tears at funerals, our pain when a loved one dies, Jesus bore. Everything that is wrong with you and me fell upon Jesus. He took it all, gladly, willingly. He took your sins...”all our iniquity fell on Him.” He took your anger and my selfishness. He bore our evil thoughts and spiteful words. Every act of laziness, every act of cruelty became His. He became sin because every sin of ours was charged to His account. Our sin and every evil consequence of sin—sickness, death, hell—fell on Jesus.

So why do we get sick? Why do we develop colds and fevers? If Jesus took our sins, why do we continue to sin? If Jesus took our death, why do we die? If Jesus took our pain and sorrow, why do we shed tears at funerals? Because of the weakness of our fallen nature.

Even Simon Peter's mother-in-law, after Jesus healed her, was not immune to fever and sickness. Her body from then on was not superhuman—able to resist every painful disease...and her body, one day, would fall asleep in death.

Jesus carried our sicknesses not so that we would never become sick, but so that our sicknesses would not be a punishment against us. He bore our sorrows not so we would never shed tears again, but so that our tears would not be cried in hopelessness. He died our death not so that our bodies would never die, but so that death has no power over us—it cannot keep us in the grave forever. Jesus did not carry our sins so that we would never sin, but so that our sins hold no curse against us. He became the “Accursed One” on the tree of the cross so that our sins cannot damn us to hell.

Because of our weak, fallen, human nature we will never be free from sin in this life, but our sins do not sentence us to death because Jesus was sentenced in our place. In Holy Baptism Jesus gives you life—the life He nourishes here through Word and Sacrament. He gives you hope in the midst of sorrow. He promises His comfort and strength in the midst of sickness and pain. He forgives your sins even though you and I know we are guilty.

It's interesting that when St. Mark writes about Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law, the word he uses for “lift”—“Jesus lifted her up,” is the same Greek word for “forgive.” (aphiemi) He “lifted” her up out of her fever, and He “lifts” us up out of our sins. The same word is used for both. The Scriptures see a close connection between sin and its consequences: sin, sickness, sorrow, pain, death, hell, the power of Satan—all of these are related, and Jesus lifts us up out of all of them because He carried all of them in His body for us.

And so when you suffer with sickness or sorrow, do not worry that God is not being fair to you. Do not be concerned that He is neglecting you. Whether He heals you quickly, as He did Peter's mother-in-law, or whether He allows you to endure much pain and misery, as He did Job—He has already carried your sickness in His body. He has already borne your grief and pain. He has already suffered the punishment of your sin. And by His death and resurrection He overcame all these evils. And so here in His flesh and blood He gives you that same victory. Here in the Word made flesh for you, Jesus lifts you out of your sin—He forgives you. Here is strength for your weak, fallen nature. Here is joy in the midst of grief. Here is hope in the midst of sickness and pain.

Even though we live in a dying world and we, too, are facing death all day long, the Lord of Life gives Himself to us in bread and wine so that we, the baptized, may focus, not on our sufferings here, but on the life we have in Christ—now, and forever in heaven. Amen.