

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
February 5, 2012**

Mark 1:29-39

“Look Closely and See... God’s Purposes in Pain!

- 1. Purpose in Pain?**
- 2. People in Mark’s Account**
- 3. Focus on Yourself**

**Hymns: 84 – 711 – Distribution: 94, 312 –
Closing: 353**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

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 told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

That evening after sunset 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. Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”

Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

In case you didn’t know, this afternoon the Super Bowl will take place. Approximately 100 million people will watch in the United States alone, companies will spend millions of dollars on commercials, tons of buffalo wings will be eaten. The Super Bowl is one of the biggest events in the world each and every year. And at the center of all the festivities, a game will be played. The biggest and fastest will race around the field, colliding

with ultimate force, dishing out pain play after play, until a winner finally endures. Football is a violent sport. You take the field knowing that you are going to have to endure a certain amount of pain. And maybe you think it is dumb, maybe you don’t quite get it, but for those players on the field and for the many, many fans of the Patriots and the Giants, there is purpose to the pain that will be endured on that field this afternoon, ie., a good paycheck, a giant ring, even a small place in history. Those players see the purpose clearly. In their minds, there is a very good purpose for what they will put their bodies through tonight.

When it comes to everyday life, finding purpose in pain isn’t always so easy, is it? It can be downright impossible to see the purpose in the pain that a diagnosis of cancer might bring. It can be very difficult to see the good in the aftermath of a broken relationship. It can be a challenge to find the positive when a lost job promises that there will be financial hardships. Pains and trials and troubles come into our lives and very rightly, our thoughts and our prayers go immediately to resolution. We want it to end. When we deal with sickness or physical pain, we think about recovery. When we encounter emotional pain and loss, we focus on finding happiness again. When we come upon hard and trying times, we look to stability and security. Those optimistic thoughts keep us going. Prayers for help and relief from God are exactly what our Father wants us to bring before him. It would be foolish to say that we shouldn’t long for comfort and relief as we deal with sadness and pain. But in our quests to overcome the trouble or find relief from the pain, do we always look for and see the purpose for which those trials come into our lives in the first place?

As we turn to Scripture this morning, we look to Mark 1, and we can use the people we find in that account to help us understand one of the reasons why God brings pain and trials into our lives. And I hope that it helps us to assess our own attitudes both in dealing with troubles and in asking God for resolution and recovery and restoration.

Mark 1 tells us this, beginning in vs. 29, **“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 told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.**

That evening after sunset 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."

The town of Capernaum was apparently a place with troubles. We hear about people coming with a variety of diseases and also people being possessed by demons. Among those who were sick was the mother-in-law of Simon Peter, Jesus' disciple. And as these people suffered, it certainly comes as no shocker that they hoped for relief. And they saw it in Jesus. In the verse just prior to our text, we are told that the news of Jesus' healing power had spread throughout the region. Here was a solution to their problems. Here was an answer to their prayers. Here was a man with great power to heal. And not surprisingly, once the people heard that relief was there to be had, they went and sought it out from the source. They came clamoring to Jesus in droves. In a bit of hyperbole, we are told that the whole town gathered outside the home where Jesus was staying. Mark tells us that these people did not even let the darkness of night stop them. Jesus was open 24 hours.

And from what we are told, Jesus was happy to bring healing to the many people who came to him for help. After all, though it wasn't the primary purpose for which he came to earth, this was certainly an important part of his earthly ministry. Think about it, we are in the beginning stages of Jesus' public ministry which started when he was 30 years old. Just a few months earlier, Jesus was known only by the people of the small town of Nazareth in which he was raised. And even those people only knew him as an obedient son and helpful assistant to his carpenter father. Part of his ministry purpose was to reveal himself to all the people of Israel. He needed to show himself as the Son of God and would do so with great power. He would show the people first that he had power to heal them from whatever troubled their lives. He would demonstrate his power over demons by driving them out with his word. He would use this power to gain an audience so that he could then preach the Law and the Gospel that these people so desperately needed to hear.

And as all these people came and gathered around Jesus to find relief from their sicknesses and pains, they were actually serving as visible proclaimers that the Good News from God had

arrived. Each one of these people's troubles was serving to shed light on who this man Jesus actually was - the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior! Every time a person was healed, the Epiphany (the revealing) became clearer.

Do you think these people had any idea what role their troubles were playing? Do you think the man with leprosy who went to Jesus that day viewed his disease as an opportunity to help Jesus in his mission? Do you think the woman with epilepsy came to Jesus for healing so that he would more fully be revealed as the Son of God? Do you think the child with club feet was brought to Jesus so that through his healing Jesus would have an opportunity to preach to more and more people? Did any of these people see the reason that God had brought trouble and pain into their lives? Do you think any of them came to Jesus for relief knowing that by doing so, they would be serving God's purposes?

Or was their desire for help focused more on themselves? Did the multitudes that came to Jesus even care who he was? Or did they just see him as a way to find personal relief? Did they only see this miracle worker as a way to restore their lives to normal and a means to make each day easier and more enjoyable for themselves?

Jesus' frustration later in his ministry tells us that for many of these people, they did not see the purpose in their pain. His lament that so many saw him only as a wonder worker shows us that they missed out on what God was accomplishing through their trials. God had brought pain into these people's lives for a reason. He wanted to use them for the glorious task of revealing his Son to the world. They were actually privileged to be under these afflictions. He wanted to show them and others that the Savior had arrived. But sadly, many missed out. They saw Jesus only as a way to find temporal relief.

With the light of what we see here in Mark, it would be a mistake not to use it to take a look at our own lives. We need to look at the trials and troubles that come and we need to think about our attitudes in those trying times. How do you view the pain that comes into your life? For what reason do you seek relief from all the troubles that come in life?

If we are going to be honest here today, many of us would probably have to admit that when trouble, pain, sadness, sickness, struggles, when any of those things first come into our lives, we view them for what they are, namely troubles and hardships and problems; and we often struggle

to see anything but the bad. For the more sanctified among us, perhaps you face pain or trouble, and your mind immediately goes to the passages of the Bible like we heard in Romans, "In all things, God works for the good." Maybe you place your trust in those assuring words and know that through this, God is going to build your faith, or bring your family closer together. But do any of us, when facing trouble, first think about how God is going to benefit through this ordeal?

Here is my point: So often, like those people we heard about in Mark, when are beat down by difficulties in life, we can actually become quite selfish. We long for a return to health; we wonder when things will be restored to a point that we can again find personal enjoyment in life. We imagine what kind of good God is going to bring into our lives for having gone through such a terrible ordeal.

And when we focus on ourselves like those people in Capernaum, we tend to fail to see how God is using us or how he wants to use us to reveal himself to more and more people. Perhaps we fail to notice what God is accomplishing by allowing our struggles to go on. "Would you pray for God's will to be done if it meant your pain would continue, but God's kingdom would be advanced? How sad it is that sin has made it so that we even contemplate such a question.

But how amazing it is that God continues to work through sinful people in spite of what they are! He worked through those people who came to the door in Capernaum and he also works through us. How amazing that God answers our prayers for help even when they come to him heaped in selfishness! How fortunate that he does so for the sake of his Son, who died to wipe away the ugliness of that selfishness! And what a blessing it is to know that God truly has a plan. He wants to use us, even when we are at our worst or feeling our lowest. He wants to use the trying times and the troubling times and painful times for the good of his salvation work. What a comfort that can be! To know that God is not only looking out for us as we face trouble, but he is looking out for his entire kingdom. As we encounter pain, let us look far beyond ourselves as we seek to find the reason for it all. As we pray for relief, may we also ask God to use us to reveal who he is to too many who do not know him. May we see his purpose in our pain, and may our prayers seek the good of his Kingdom. Amen.