



# CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

*Reaching out with the heart of Christ*

## **“Desolate Places – Eternal Destiny” – St. Mark 1:29-39**

*5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany of our Lord – February 5, 2012*

**Pastor Chip Winter**

Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon is the Gospel appointed for the day and already read from St. Mark's account.

My dear family in Christ, Peter is one of the first disciples and, in almost any way you look at it, one of the foremost. We know that he said things which got him into trouble, that he was a leader who needed to be taken aside and corrected on more than one occasion. That's in part because there is more written about him than any other disciple, but also – and not to put too fine a point on it – because he didn't truly realize what Jesus was doing.

In our text, covering the early goings-on on the earthly ministry of our Lord, Andrew and Simon Peter, James and John were with Jesus as He taught in the synagogue on the Sabbath. This is a continuation of last week's text, where Jesus left the crowds astonished at His authoritative teaching and His casting out of the unclean spirit. You can imagine the disciples wide-eyed and slack-jawed at this early display of the Savior's power.

Going to Peter's house following the worship, they found that Simon Peter's mother-in-law was sick. She had a fever, which may not sound like a great deal to us, but back then they didn't have much in the way of doctors and medicines. When you had a fever it was serious and a cause of great concern.

Jesus walked into the house and was told about the woman. He went into the room where she lay and took her hand in His. Lifting her up, she was miraculously healed! She got busy preparing and serving a meal, as life for her was back to normal. But that display of Jesus' power was anything but normal to all who heard of it.

The word spread throughout the village. Jesus was stronger than the illness that sickened them, stronger than demonic power that haunted them. They lined up at the door as people kept bringing others and kept bringing them and kept bringing them to Jesus.

When the household arose the next morning after that busy, late night, the villagers begin to bring people to Jesus again, but Jesus was not to be found in the house. Simon Peter and the others searched for Him, finally finding Him in a desolate place, a wild and secluded place, which somewhat puzzled the searchers. He had gone there to pray.

Can you imagine what might have been running through Simon Peter's mind? Jesus had just started this ministry and crowds were flocking to see Him. People were extremely excited about the possibilities here. A few more miracles and they would have a veritable army with which to work. No one would be able to resist Jesus. He'd keep His followers healthy, He'd keep the evil powers at bay – no one would be able to oppose the Jesus and life would be wonderful with Him around.

So, what's a person to make of Jesus being out in a desolate place instead of doing more miracles, instead of building His popularity and fame, striking while the iron is hot? The whole world is coming to Him but He wants to go to other places, to preach to them their need for repentance of whatever sin is leading them away from God and to believe in Him.

Now here's a thought worth pondering. We've often thought of Jesus regaining strength in this quiet time in prayer with the Father. But might it also be that Jesus was in prayer in a desolate

place because that's where Jesus confronts temptation? Tempted in every way as we are (Hebrews 4:15) Jesus may have been tempted here to give up His mission of bringing salvation to a world of sin and demonic evils. He had been sent not to build an army and overthrow governments, but to overcome Satan. He had been sent not to carve out a few square miles of ancient Israel and to set up a new Garden of Eden but to open heaven's gates to us. His mission was not to become a miracle worker who would satisfy the desires of those who stood in line to see Him, but to do His Father's will and bring eternal life to all through His suffering, death and resurrection.

This was a temptation Jesus was facing. He could stick around Capernaum and build a little empire for a select few. But that would have meant abandoning what He came to do. He had been in a desolate place, before. In the wilderness, Satan tempted Him with this very temptation – if Jesus would just worship him. Jesus would have none of that! Three years later, in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night of His betrayal, the night He would be beaten and sentenced to die, He was tempted to walk away from His mission of bringing forgiveness, eternal life and salvation to the whole world.

But Jesus would not give in to the temptation. No, He goes to the most desolate place of all. It is a cross. It is a place teeming with all our sins. It is a place where all our burdens and hurts are gathered together. It is a place of punishment, our punishment. It is a place of agony and suffering. It is a place of death. It is a place where even God the Father in heaven abandons Him to the evils of hell.

Yet out of these places of desolation comes our eternal destiny. His mission was to bring forgiveness, to bear our griefs and sins. His mission was to open up heaven's gate for us. His mission was to bring eternal life. And on Easter morning, He did just that. Out of a desolate tomb,

a grave, a place of death, Jesus rises from the dead. Satan is defeated, evil is cast aside and death is undone. Sin no longer holding Him down the mission is accomplished and Salvation is won!

I can understand how Simon Peter could get it wrong at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He hadn't seen Jesus die. He hadn't yet walked with Jesus risen from the dead. But what about us?

I'm afraid we don't always get it, either. Sometimes we are more like Peter at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. In the Internet article "**Congregations Gone Wild**" from the New York Times (August 7, 2010), there is the revelation that many Americans' expectations for worship are more like Peter's early expectations. The article says that congregations that are suffering a loss of members are those that challenge people to repent, to do what's right in life, to share in the suffering of others, to take their discipleship and commitment seriously, to do personal devotions and outreach ministry. The pastors whose sermons make the comfortable uneasy are not well received. People want their church to confirm their preferred political positions or say it's okay to spend so much money and time on what they want. The pressure is for short sermons that tell amusing stories and make people feel good about themselves.

Consider our prayer life. Certainly, we are to pray to our Lord about anything. He wants us to bring our requests to Him. But sometimes I'm uncomfortable about a bulk of the prayer requests having to do with healing, safety, jobs and finances, and how few prayer requests have to do with the growth of the body of Christ, about people doing what is right in life, about repentance, stronger devotional lives and resisting temptation. Certainly we can pray for health and protection and even money, but the bulk of our prayers need to focus on why Jesus came, about our eternal destiny that comes out of the desolate places in Jesus' life. The Lord's Prayer, for example, has its one petition on physical life (daily bread) while the rest of the petitions focus on more spiritual and eternal matters.

Now, don't get me wrong. Back at Peter's house, Jesus did heal the sick and cast out demons. And today our Lord blesses us with good health as well as with medical facilities that alleviate pain and suffering. We live in a country with much wealth and comfort. Jesus is our shield and protection as we live day-by-day and we need to thank Him for these blessings.

But don't stop there. Jesus' mission was bigger, much bigger. When you get right down to it, we need to become more like Peter after he understood. And we have so many ways to do that. We have 2000 years of Church history and teaching to help us see what Jesus came to do. We have the Scriptures to read and study as over and over again they point us to the cross and Jesus' resurrection. We have Sunday School and Bible classes to teach us why Jesus gave His life for us. We have artwork and jewelry to take us to the cross. Look around. See how the stained glass windows, the cross, the parament designs focus on Christ Jesus.

Jesus does bless u in our lives now, but He does so much more. Jesus went to the desolate places, and out of those desolate places He brings forgiveness, heaven's gates open wide, and salvation. Yes, out of the desolate places Jesus brings our eternal destiny.

