

When Trouble Comes, Jesus Is There **Mark 1:29-31**

Dear Friends in Christ,

In a world filled with bad economic news, layoffs, business failures and bank closures, wars and rumors of wars, Somali pirates, massive winter storm-induced power outages, and the Bernie Madoff scandal, some stories seem to stand out for their heinous nature...crimes within a family.

The estranged brother-in-law of singer and actress Jennifer Hudson is charged with the murder of Hudson's mother, brother and nephew. An eight year old Arizona boy is in custody, accused of murdering his father and another man. San Quentin Prison is now home for Scott Peterson, convicted murderer of his wife and their unborn son. The body of little Caylee Anthony is found and her mother, Casey, is the chief suspect.

If this is what's happening in the homes, in families, between husband and wife, between parent and child...it's no wonder there are problems in the schools and in the work place and on the streets. When homes collapse, when families come apart, when parents have no love or care for each other or for their children, our country is in big trouble.

There is no other area in life in which the worth and the value of Christianity are so apparent as in the home. Where Christ is the head of the house, the unseen guest at the table, the silent listener to every conversation, there is a difference. No matter what the income, no matter how many adults or children or grandparents or grandchildren make up the family...whether it's a man and a woman alone or one parent with three children, if Christ is the head of the home, there will be a difference.

And that difference will be most pronounced in times of affliction and crisis. Because sooner or later affliction of some sort or another comes to each home...each household. How do you react? How will you react when it happens in your life?

Our text is about a time when there was a crisis in Simon Peter's family. His mother-in-law became very ill. Now, the only way to get a mother-in-law is to first be married. And it is clear that Peter, the Apostle Peter, was married. He was married and it seems as if his wife's mother, his mother-in-law, lived with him and his wife. This wasn't uncommon in those days. Widowed women were dependent on their children for support. There were no life insurance companies, no Social Security, no Medicare or Medicaid back then.

One day, Peter's mother-in-law became sick. Luke, the physician, describes the illness as a high fever. It alarmed her friends and family. It looked like the end was near. So they sent for Jesus. Jesus had been teaching in the synagogue, amazing people with his authority and

power (as we heard in last week's sermon). The friends and family of Peter's mother-in-law wanted Jesus to be with her in this time of crisis.

Yes, even the homes and families of the disciples were beset by crisis and affliction. No family is exempt from trouble. Oh some families, some couples run along smoothly for a while...sometimes quite a while...before a major illness or major crisis comes along. Other households, it seems, are continually grappling with major problems.

What form affliction will take in your family, no one can tell. Maybe it will be the death of a father or mother, a husband or wife...a child. Homes so recently alive and happy are suddenly, unexpectedly, sad and lonely and quiet and grief fills the hearts of those who are left.

With some it will be financial setbacks, financial losses. It's happening to many right now. This is a hard blow to take, especially later in life if you are approaching retirement or are already retired. Years of frugal living, careful planning, saving, and investment seem to turn into nothingness overnight. It can even look like the end of the line when a medical emergency or unexpected major surgery wipe out what little savings are left.

With others it is a lingering, debilitating illness or deteriorating health. What a strain this puts on a household, on a couple, on a family. Alzheimer's, multiple sclerosis, ALS, cancer and other progressive diseases can drain the strength and the will even from the strongest among us. It's a cross that's hard to bear.

Maybe the most common affliction is severe disharmony in the home...constant tension between husband and wife...an unfaithful spouse...continuous warfare...self-willed, out-of-control children, disrespectful, hateful...parents shirking their duties and responsibilities...motivated by rage one day and drained with exhaustion the next. These are the tensions and afflictions which tend to crush the soul out of any family.

Yes, all families eventually face crises and afflictions and all the members of a household are participants. Don't kid yourself. Even young children are affected when a home is afflicted. What will your household do when it happens? What has it done in the past? Is it splintered and blasted apart...everyone for himself? Will you forget about God completely when trouble comes in the door? Or worse yet, will you curse him and blame him for the crisis, the affliction?

Or is the family pulled together, strengthened, united behind a common front? Yes, there can be blessings for you, even in affliction, if it forces the family to do what Peter's family did...turn to Jesus for help and strength.

When called, Jesus went directly to Peter's house and to the bedside of Peter's mother-in-law. Once at her bedside, he simply touched her hand. That's all it took, a touch. His power went out to her and she was healed. Her fever left her suddenly and completely. It was a miraculous, immediate cure. Jesus in the home of Simon Peter - Jesus meant life and health and joy and happiness.

Of course, when afflictions come today, the Christian family is wise to use many resources. God has given us the wonders of science and medicine, and they are here for you to use. Debt and credit counselors, and family counselors and marriage counselors (if they counsel from a Christian perspective) are here for you to use. But there is a healing power that's above and beyond all that. You can invite it into your home through God's Word and through prayer.

When believers fervently pray to God, as only people in distress can pray, when loved ones and fellow-believers pray with them and for them, when the will of God is sought and the assurance of his healing presence is recalled from his word, when Christ's body and blood are received in Holy Communion, Christ steps into your home with the touch of his healing even as he did in the home of Peter.

But remember, the Lord hasn't promised to bring immediate healing in every instance. When he doesn't, there is still comfort and strength in the realization of his presence in your home. Because he is not only the physician of the body, not only the healer of homes, not only the mender of marriages, but what's more important, he is the steward of your soul...your soul's guardian, its caretaker.

He did his greatest work not in his many miracles of healing while here on earth, but in winning your soul for eternity. The sin in your life, the sin into which you were born, the daily disobedience to God's will, could separate your soul from God for eternity. Jesus took care of this dreadful sin problem, but it wasn't easy. It required Jesus to become one of us...to enter this world of affliction and trouble. It required Jesus to live a life in complete accord with God's law, as your substitute. It required Jesus to take your place under God's awesome wrath and suffer the death penalty that you deserved. Now, through faith in Jesus your sin problem is solved. His blood cleanses us from every sin. Through faith in Jesus, you have forgiveness for every sin...forgiveness that is full and free. Through faith in Jesus, you possess eternal life...a life of unending joy in God's presence with fellow-believers forever.

Once you fully realize this, you can dump the load of guilt you've been carrying and experience the real peace that exists between you and God...a peace that passes all understanding, a peace that brings comfort to the soul and to the body, a peace that exists even during times of trial and tribulation.

Sometimes the strongest Christian homes are those which are weather-beaten and battle-scarred with the evidence of struggle and affliction and crisis. Great Christian character, perseverance and strength are more often formed in the fire of adversity and trial, than in homes that are spared affliction.

A home which Jesus has visited in the days of crisis and tribulation...a home where he, in his wisdom, has brought relief or healing...such a home will feel even greater indebtedness to him. You see, release from affliction often leads to a greater sense of gratitude. And gratitude leads to service.

The concluding words of our text tell us that when she felt Jesus' healing touch, Peter's mother-in-law immediately got up from her sickbed and waited on Jesus and the disciples. She was completely cured. And now, as proof of her healing and as an expression of her gratitude, she served her Lord.

Once you have weathered the crisis and endured the affliction, let the memory linger with you. Remember the answered prayers. Recall the healing Jesus brings. Reflect on his power to make whole what was once asunder. Out of gratitude, out of thanks, out of love, you too can seek to serve him. There are many ways to serve him with your life. But one of the best is to find another family, or another couple, or another household enduring the same affliction and minister to them. Offer your help and assure them of God's love and of his help which is only a prayer away.

Family afflictions?...they're going to come to everybody...if not today, then tomorrow. When they come be prepared to meet them in Christian faith and with the strength that comes from the gospel in word and sacrament. Invite Jesus into your home. Feel his healing touch and sustaining power. And then spend your days at peace with him and in grateful service to him. And may that peace which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.