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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
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Mark 1:29-39
Jesus in Our Homes

In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

And immediately he left the synagogue, and entered *the house* of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. (Mark 1:29, RSV)

HOME, SWEET HOME!

This morning I want to talk about a happy subject: home! “Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.” Indeed, I want to talk about an even happier subject: Our Lord Jesus *in* our homes. That is the commendable sequence we see in this morning’s Gospel story: Jesus comes out of the synagogue and goes into a home. May it be so with us. May it be that when we leave this dear church this morning, we do not leave alone, but bring Christ with us into our homes.

In the parsonage, Carol and I have an old rose-framed picture hanging on our kitchen wall. I brought it from my childhood home. It is not simply a pretty picture or a pious saying that no really cares about, but rather expresses the principle of my parents’ home:

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Christ is the Head of this House



**The unseen Host at every meal
The silent Listener to every conversation**

Carol and I try to live by the same ideal. When we leave church on Sunday morning or Wednesday evening, we do not want to wander on home all lonely, leaving Jesus behind in the church. Instead, we would be honored and grateful if Jesus would come with us too. And he is willing!

So, my topic this morning is Jesus in our homes.

PETER'S HOUSE.

We do not know what Peter's house looked like. I wish we did. We can be sure that Peter did not need to live in a mansion in order for Jesus to be willing to visit there. We can leave the matter of mansions to Jesus himself. He goes to his heavenly Father in order to prepare mansions for us there. Meanwhile, the humblest of homes is perfectly fine for Jesus. He is ready to enter any home.

So, let's image Peter's house to be a humble one. That seems natural. After all, Peter and Andrew were ordinary working men. They were fishermen. There is even a suggestion in the Bible that Peter and Andrew were *poor* working men. I mean this: In St. Matthew's story about the call of the first disciples, it appears that the brothers Peter and Andrew are the poor sort of fishermen -- the kind who do not own a boat, but rather try to make a living by standing on the shore and casting their nets out into the water:

¹⁸And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. ¹⁹And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. ²⁰And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-20, KJV)

But the next two disciples -- the brothers James and John -- are the more prosperous kind of fishermen. They have a boat. Well, actually, it is the boat of their father Zebedee:

²¹And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. ²²And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him. (Matthew 4:21-22, KJV)

So, I imagine the home of James and John to be fancier than that of Peter and Andrew. But that's okay. Jesus is ready to come to anyone's home, no matter how humble or fancy it might be.

So, let's imagine Peter and Andrew's house to be a humble one, kind of like the cottage in my parent's picture. By the way, Carol and I have a set of china with a painting of a small cottage like this on the plates. I once mentioned over the supper table that I liked that cottage and hoped Carol and I could retire there someday. To which Sam exclaimed, "What! You want to retire on a plate!" Well, no. We hope our retirement home won't be *that* humble. But, whatever God provides, whether nice or poor, the great thing is our Lord Jesus deigns to dwell there.

A DOMESTIC SCENE

I love this morning's Gospel story because it is a domestic scene. This story takes place not in a synagogue, not in the Temple in Jerusalem, not on a mountain, nor on a tempestuous sea. It simply takes place in a home, like yours and mine.

I imagine that as we approach that home, we find the evidence of fishing about -- maybe nets spread out on the shrubs, drying in the sunshine. Maybe there are fishing boots on the steps, to not track mud into the house. A rain slicker hangs on a peg in the entranceway.

Oh! I am so curious about Peter's wife! I know he had one -- both because our text speaks of Peter's "mother-in-law" and because St. Paul speaks of Peter's wife. Indeed, there is almost a tone of envy in Paul as he speaks of Peter's wife:

⁴Do we not have the right to our food and drink? ⁵Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife, as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas (Peter)? (1 Corinthians 9:4-5, RSV)

I wonder what that lady was like. And I wonder what she thought of her man -- that impulsive, slow-to-understand, fickle, born-leader of a man. But alas, we see no sign of her in this morning's story. Instead we hear of Peter's mother-in-law.

THE SICK WOMAN

She is ill. She is feverish. Our text says that immediately they tell Jesus that she is sick. "Anon they tell him of her." Perhaps they are embarrassed that there is no one to provide hospitality, as if the men themselves are simply bumps on the log, too awkward and unlearned in domestic grace to even lay out some cheese and crackers and glasses of water.

But Jesus complains about none of those things. Instead he does what he loves to do: he healed the lady. After all, he is our "great Physician of body and soul." In any town or village, there are probably some interesting sights to be seen: museums or coffee shops where local bands play, or picturesque parks or river banks. But Jesus hastens right on by those things. He heads to Peter's house, because there is someone there who needs help. As he himself put it, Jesus came "not to be served, but to serve":

²⁵But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. ²⁶It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; ²⁸even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28, RSV)

THE PATTERN

Well let's break off from imagining Peter's house and wife and so on, and instead think of the *pattern* -- that blessed pattern. Our Lord Jesus, who healed Peter's mother in law in olden days, lives still. He has promised to be where "two or three are gathered together in his name." That is, he promises to be in the church, no matter how lowly the church is or how few the worshipers.

But this too is true: this same Jesus is willing to go out the church door at the end of the liturgy and to accompany us all the way to our homes. And the thing about our home is that have what can be called "local loves" there. We are called to love *the whole world*, it is true, and yet, do we not have special responsibilities for our local loves -- for the people to whom we bound by the ties of affection or family? If we do not bring them to Jesus, maybe someone else will. But even if so, we are the ones who have the special location in their lives to bring them the great Physician of their bodies and souls, even Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is with our friends and family members as it is with each of us individually: we have various seasons in our lives. Sometimes we enjoy a season of spiritual refreshment, when all goes well and we know some good measure of peace and

happiness. But sometimes, we enter into a darker and gloomier time of time, when it might as well rain all day as far as we care, and when the dawn does not rescue us anymore. Or, if our spirit is strong, our bodies might be exhausted or hurting. Poverty might grind down mother and father in a way the children cannot detect -- and God bless the children, let us hope they do not have to detect that their parents are vulnerable and struggling. But nonetheless, it can be so. The very people God has entrusted to us might be careworn and discouraged for some season of life. Peter's mother-in-law might have been strong and chipper most of the time. But on this particular day, she was sick in bed, wracked with fever. Give her half-a-chance and she will rebound. She will rise up from bed and give her faith and gratitude the good practical form of deeds of hospitality. But now she is sick and feverish. Glad to say, she becomes better when Peter and Andrew bring Jesus home to her.

In like manner, each of us becomes better when Jesus is brought home to us, for our encouragement and for our shepherding along in life.

GOD SETS US DOWN IN COMMUNITIES

God sets us down in communities. He did that from the beginning, judging that it was not good for Adam that he should be alone. So the good Lord entrusts us to the care of other people and other people to our care. If we would take good care of our friends, let us notice about them that at some times in life, they might be struggling and feverish -- if not feverish like Peter's mother-in-law, still troubled in some manner. If we ourselves benefit from the encouragement and shepherding of Jesus, those dear to us might too. Indeed they will, if only they will give him room in their lives.

Cherish your friends and love ones, including sharing with them the Great Physician of our bodies and souls, even Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.