

Epiphany 5B. February 4, 2024. Faith Episcopal Church, Poulsbo , WA. Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147; I Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39. “I’ve got you.”

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. ³²That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. ³⁵In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷When they found him, they said to him, ‘Everyone is searching for you.’ ³⁸He answered, ‘Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.’ ³⁹And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

The Sermon



Isabel got onto a NY City subway and sat down next to a college-age girl who was sobbing. Isabel tried to comfort her as did the woman on the other side of the girl. The girl said she was overwhelmed with anxiety and on the way to her therapist. The man sitting across from her gave her an unopened cold soda which she accepted. Isabel skipped her stop to stay with the young woman whose distress was palpable. All three passengers offered words of encouragement and gradually the girl began to breathe normally and calm down. Soon they came to the last stop in Manhattan and all three passengers realized they had to get off now. Isabel asked the girl if she’d be o.k. and all three said they were sorry they had to get off. The girl sniffled but nodded o.k. As the three were exiting the train, they saw another woman swoop in from somewhere down the car and sit down next to the anxious girl. “I got her,” she said.¹

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¹ Isabel Walcott Draves, NY Times, “Metropolitan Diary” Dec. 10, 2023. Illustration by Agnes Lee.

I imagine Peter and Jesus and their friends at Peter's house (we call Simon: Peter). They are hoping to find the matriarch of the house ready to set dinner before them. But she was deeply distressed. Why wouldn't her fever break. She HAD to get up and supervise the meal and this visit. The family members and the guests looked at one another in anxious worry. And I imagine Jesus, like the woman from "somewhere down the car" sitting down next to the venerable old woman and saying, "I got her."

And he did have her and he did hold her hand and lift her up.

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We are anxious about the future. About our jobs, about our finances, about chores and repairs that cry out for attention, about our kids, grandkids, parents, friends. About the latest medical visit. About situations in our nation and world. About our campers in the parking lot. About our personal failings, misjudgments, troubled relationships.

The disciples in today's Gospel lesson were anxious about Jesus' whereabouts. "Everyone is searching for you," they said after they found him in a deserted place where he was praying. He was recharging his batteries for the next town they would visit and for the encounters with the sick people who cried to him for help.

"Everyone is searching for you." We know this today. We are searching for ways to experience relief from anxiety and stress, from worry and from illness.

Where are you, Jesus? Swoop in, sit down next to me and tell my worried soul, "I got her." "I got him." "I got them." "I got you."

The women and man in the subway car story were disciples of the living God. They may not necessarily have been church-goers, or observant Jews, or pious folk of any stripe, but they did what the young girl needed at the moment. They were the hands of healing. The therapist picked up the baton and continued the work.

I spent some time at St. Michael's this week. Jesus was there in the hands and minds of nurses and doctors doing healing work. There were good outcomes, people leaving the hospital with smiles on their faces. And, yes, there are sad outcomes, like when the cancer will not quit and the types of medicine we know of will no longer help.

For our sweet sister Sara, there were people from our church and from Unity church who went to sit and sing with her during her last days. “She will pass,” says the compassionate doctor with the sad smile, “in a short time.”

But she will always, always be in the hands of the Great Physician, in the hands of the God who made her, who loves her, who will bring her to eternal peace. “I’ve got her,” says the Lord.

We cry out, we may even sob like the girl on the subway, for the refugees, for the hostages, for the people whose homes and livelihoods have been ruined. Our tears are God’s tears. Those who reach out to help, who donate to care agencies, who pray for peace, who write letters to legislators – those are the Christ-figures who “swoop in” and say, “I’ve got them.”

May it be so: in your life, in the face of your worries and struggles and joys. May it be so: in the lives of all in need. And may we, like Jesus, when things get too chaotic, get up and go to a deserted place and pray. For everyone is searching for us and for our Lord’s words of comfort. For the One who will say, “I’ve got you.”

Amen.