

5 Epiphany  
 February 4, 2018  
 Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's  
 Isaiah 40:21-31  
 Psalm 147:1-12, 21c  
 1 Corinthians 9:16-23  
 Mark 1:29-39

Jesus went to Simon Peter's mother-in-law who was sick with fever, and he healed her. Then he healed more people from the huge crowd that had gathered around the house where he was staying. Jesus' new band of followers asked him to stay there, and to keep healing people (of course!). But Jesus said, "We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them too, because that is what I came out to do." Jesus came to teach. But he also felt compelled to heal, partly because of the compassion he had for the needs of people, but he also healed because he knew how important it was to **meet people where they are**, if he expected them to listen to what he came to teach them.

If you are sick with the flu, or you have a splitting headache, or are fighting an upset stomach --- are you in the mood to leave your home and go to a motivational seminar, and get charged up about the possibilities life might have in store for you? Of course not. [In psychology: Maslow's hierarchy of needs: physical, safety, love & belonging, esteem, self-actualization.] And Jesus knew that. So he healed, but then went back to his core purpose; to teach the Good News of what God was doing in the world.

Jesus meets up with you wherever you are every day – emotionally, intellectually, or spiritually - and is ready to lead you to the next level of your relationship with God. For Jesus to get Paul's attention to his presence, he had to knock him off his horse, and strike him blind! That's the place that Paul was in, and Jesus got his attention. I'm thankful that Jesus didn't have to work that hard on me, to learn to recognize his presence; his meeting me where I was.

Ruth and I were overwhelmed when we heard that she had cancer. We knew that we needed guidance through the decisions about her treatments. We talked and prayed, and we saw God make a path for us to the right doctors, doing the right tests, giving the right treatments, to do everything humanity knows how to do to stop that horrible disease in its tracks. We needed comfort when we each lost our parents; we saw God do wondrous things to gather our family and friends around us, to give us the comfort we needed. And when I have felt far from God, not able

to feel Him close to me, and I've asked Him to make me stronger --- to help me sense that He is close, I've been "led" to a new book, or somebody with their own close experience of God, or a song that moves my spirit; and I have felt my spirit get in touch again with God's spirit. Life has shown me that God does meet me wherever I am. God meets us wherever we are.

When Paul talked with Jews, he honored the commitment they made to follow dietary laws. When he talked with Gentiles, he knew that dietary laws didn't matter to them, and he honored that. Paul learned to take on the character of Christ, and to "become all things to all people, that [he] might by all means save some." He was modeling how Christians should be witnesses to other people. Paul knew he had the power to change lives **by being centered in his core purpose**; to bring glory to God, and to bring people to Christ. He never lost track of his purpose, but **he met people wherever they were** emotionally, intellectually or spiritually.

This adds a deeper understanding why Jesus ate with tax collectors, and talked with the Samaritan (Gentile) woman, and ate meals with people who others avoided being seen with.

Jesus is our model for action. Paul was modeling the same principle: lead by meeting people where they are. That means setting aside judgments, or first impressions, or assumptions, and instead looking for a common link with someone; and then looking for that link to grow the relationship into trust; and then to remember our core purpose; to bring others to Christ. A pledge from Cursillo sums it up very nicely: Make a friend, be a friend, bring a friend to Christ.

Life in this faith community is based in our commitment **to help each other** to be alert for Jesus to **meet us right where we are**: whether we are alert or exhausted; healthy or not very well; feeling loved or lonely; feeling close to God or disconnected.

May your life and mine be centered on our core purpose; to meet people wherever they are, and to invite them into our journey with Christ. Amen.