

Last week we heard about Jesus teaching and healing in the synagogue at Capernaum, and how he astounded the people with his authority. This week we move about a hundred yards from the synagogue to Simon Peter's house. A house in Capernaum, believed to be this very house, has been excavated and evidence of a first century dwelling found. Above it there is an extraordinary looking structure, a bit like a flying saucer on stilts. It's actually a church, built to hover over the site, with a glass bottom in the centre so that you can peer down into where, by tradition, today's story took place. Just behind the house, the Sea of Galilee sparkles in the sun. It isn't difficult to half close your eyes, travel back 2,000 years and imagine Jesus and his new band of followers striding across from the synagogue to enjoy some hospitality from Simon's mother-in-law.

This was no doubt intended to be a short break from their hectic schedule, but instead Jesus is called upon once more to bring healing and restoration, this time to someone he must have known personally. She repays him with practical kindness, serving a meal so that Jesus and his followers can rest and recuperate. But the peace doesn't last long: Jesus' reputation is spreading and by evening the whole town has turned out with their sick, pleading for healing. Jesus healed many people and eventually, when they had all left, her rested, probably not until the small hours.

A few years ago the Diocese of St Albans hosted our relatively new Archbishop Justin on a pastoral visit. I was involved in organising an informal supper in St Albans Abbey with about 30 young people who might be considering ministry in the church. At the planning meeting the Archbishop's chaplain outlined his preferences: to visit as many people and places as possible, to contribute to the missional work already going on, to do real work and not just pose for photographs. Over the course of three days he followed a punishing schedule, always cheerful, always with appropriate words to say, drawing energy from the people around him.

At our supper with young people my role – agreed with his chaplain in advance – was to sit him down at the first table of six, make sure he had a plate of food and then interrupt him every 10 minutes and move him to the next table, carrying his plate and glass of water with him. He loved it. Our Bishop later

told me that, before walking across from the Bishop's house where he was staying, Justin had retired to his room for a 20 minute rest and emerged fresh as the proverbial daisy. And after our supper he went back to rest and to pray. Luckily, with no signs of indigestion.

So it is with Jesus in our story. He's up again before dawn, needing spiritual nourishment just as he had needed food the day before. The disciples are understandably worried and go out to look for him, hoping to persuade him to return. But no, Jesus breezily announces that he wants to go to more local villages so that he can preach there too. 'That is why I have come', he says. So off he sets, throughout the Galilee region, preaching and driving out demons.

Jesus has found his calling: to teach, to preach, to heal – and to lead others to follow him. There is no mention of suffering and death, that will come later. The urgent imperative now is to proclaim the message we heard him announce after his baptism: 'The kingdom of God is near; repent and believe!' And he proclaims it through word and action, the two inextricably linked.

At our Family Praise service just an hour ago we discussed this story and I asked the children what Jesus had come to do. With the help of some picture prompts they came up with three things they had seen him do in the story: to heal, to teach and to pray. Then I asked what else Jesus might have come to do, and they added.....

My follow up question led to some careful thinking. 'What can we do as his followers, to continue Jesus' work – at home, at school, with our friends and our families?' They said.....

- Help them out
- Pray for them
- Love them

Jesus proclaimed 'the Kingdom'. What did he mean? Well, he spelled it out in those words he quoted from Isaiah: sight for the blind, freedom for the prisoner and the oppressed, comfort for the afflicted, good news for the poor.

And he followed his words up with actions, as we have seen in this first chapter of Mark and as we shall continue to see as we read on. Not only did he teach and heal and pray, he went out of his way to spend time with the outcasts and the marginalised: tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, women and children – all those who were shunned by the powerful.

As individuals and as a church community we have opportunities to join in this work, not only proclaiming the good news but delivering it in practical ways. The possibilities are wide, the Agenda huge. But there is no better place to start than with our young people, if we can. Let us

- Help people
- Pray for them
- And love them