

Greater Hartford Conference, New England Synod, ELCA  
 Pericope Study for Sunday, February 8, 2015 – Epiphany 5B  
 Presented Tue 2/3/15 by Richard Burgess

**Collect / POD (ELW)**

Everlasting God, you give strength to the weak and power to the faint. Make us agents of your healing and wholeness, that your good news may be made known to the ends of your creation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Suggested Sermon Titles (Use at your own risk.)	Is	1Cor	Mk
Haven't You Heard?	X		
Trust in the Lord and Find New Strength	X		
God Keeps Track of the Stars – Can God Keep Track of You?	X		
My Reward Is My Proclamation		X	
I Do It All for the Sake of the Gospel		X	
I Make Myself a Slave to All		X	
Jesus Will Take Care of Your In-Laws			X
Looking for Jesus Where Nobody Is			X

**Lesson I: Isaiah 40:21–31 (NRSV)**

<sup>21</sup>Have you not known? Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the beginning?

Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

<sup>22</sup>It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,

and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;  
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,

and spreads them like a tent to live in;

<sup>23</sup>who brings princes to naught,  
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

<sup>24</sup>Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,  
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,

when he blows upon them, and they wither,

and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

<sup>25</sup>To whom then will you compare me,  
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

<sup>26</sup>Lift up your eyes on high and see:  
Who created these?

He who brings out their host and numbers them,

calling them all by name;  
because he is great in strength,  
mighty in power,  
not one is missing.

<sup>27</sup>Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and speak, O Israel,

"My way is hidden from the LORD,  
and my right is disregarded by my God"?

<sup>28</sup>Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.

<sup>29</sup>He gives power to the faint,

and strengthens the powerless.

<sup>30</sup>Even youths will faint and be weary,  
and the young will fall exhausted;

<sup>31</sup>but those who wait for the LORD shall  
renew their strength,

they shall mount up with wings like eagles,

they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.

**Notes, Observations, & Thought Questions**

Is 40.21a, 28a *Have you not known? Have you not heard?* How does this function structurally? Both go on to describe God as creator, but what is the connection between the power of God and the transitoriness of life (40.22-24) and the God's sustaining of the weary (40.28c-31)?

Is 40.26 *Look up at the sky! Who created the stars you see? The one who leads them out like an army, he knows how many there are and calls each one by name! His power is so great –not one of them is ever missing!* (GNT) I think this is a great image, but the stars are unfortunately missing in NRSV. Sort of an OT version of "look at the birds of the air . . . lilies of the field . . ." But also, this might be the key to the passage as Second Isaiah links the power of God with God's ability and faithfulness in using that power to care for and sustain.

## Lesson II: 1 Corinthians 9:16–23 (NRSV)

<sup>16</sup>If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! <sup>17</sup>For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. <sup>18</sup>What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

<sup>19</sup>For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. <sup>20</sup>To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. <sup>21</sup>To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. <sup>22</sup>To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. <sup>23</sup>I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

## Notes, Observations, & Thought Questions

1Cor 9.18 *What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.* Or as Paul puts it in 9.23 *I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.* Explain this so that a five year old can understand. How is the gospel its own reward in and of itself? Just what are the “blessings” of the gospel? Why, then, choose “not to make full use of my rights in the gospel”?

1Cor 9.22b *I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.* This is hardly efficient utilitarianism (The Good = the most good for the most people most of the time, ie, maximize your bang for the buck.) Is one supposed to give one's all for the sake of some all the time? Can this lead to burnout? Is that necessarily bad, ie, could one interpret the cross as Jesus burning out and what we are called to do?

**Gospel: Mark 1:29–39 (NRSV)**

<sup>29</sup>As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup>Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. <sup>31</sup>He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

<sup>32</sup>That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. <sup>33</sup>And the whole city was gathered around the door. <sup>34</sup>And 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.

<sup>35</sup>In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup>And Simon and his companions hunted for him. <sup>37</sup>When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." <sup>38</sup>He 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." <sup>39</sup>And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

**Notes, Observations, & Thought Questions**

Why are these three mini-episodes put together into one lesson?

Mark tends to use few words and use them carefully. What is the value of "they told him about her at once" in 1.30? Do you think Jesus responded with that sense of urgency? Why or why not?

Assuming again that everything in scripture, particularly in Mark, is there for a reason, what is the significance of Simon's mother in law apparently serving those present immediately following her healing?

Healing people and casting out demons seems like pretty important, good work. (Think of how we both rely on and support our local hospitals.) What is the point of bringing "all who were sick or possessed with demons" yet only curing and casting out "many"? Shouldn't Jesus have had a better batting average than that? Likewise, what is the point of leaving "everyone" who was looking for Jesus in order to go to the neighboring towns (1.37-38)? How does this play to someone who has been praying for healing and not received it?

Is Jesus' casting out demons throughout Galilee (1.39) connected with his not permitting them to speak because they knew him? (1.34) What is the relevance of the Messianic Secret today?