

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
February 5, 2012

I remember a day in my distant past when my father took me to the driveway of our garage and set a pan in front of me.

He put some gasoline in that pan and then with careful instruction - - - handing me a fire extinguisher - - - lighted that gasoline on fire. It was a part of his training as a worker in a refinery and he was passing it on to me.

As it flamed up and became a visible sign of danger, he instructed me in how I - - - with the extinguisher - - - could safely put out the fire.

It is a lesson I have never forgotten.

It is a teaching that on at least two occasions has made the difference between a major fire and just an incident.

Teaching like this and experience like this is important.

In Galilee, Jesus began his ministry, proclaiming the good news of God and healing the sick. His listeners were astounded by his power and by the authority with which he taught, cured, and cast out demons.

Word about him spread - - - and soon - - - even though he sought to find some time to himself - - - his disciples find him and tell him excitedly, "Everyone is searching for you." Everyone wants to be convinced of the coming kingdom of God and to be relieved of their suffering.

Yet – instead of setting up shop in one town alone - - - where he and his

disciples might attract followers and maybe even profit from his popularity - - -
Jesus doesn't stay put.

"Let us - - - he tells them - - - go on to the neighboring towns, so that I
may pass on the message there also; for that is why I came."

PAUSE HERE

I don't know how many times I have passed on my father's training
(teaching) about fire control - - - but I can say that I haven't kept it to myself.
Because of what Dad Saling taught me - - - others have benefitted perhaps
many times over. And that is the point – ISN'T IT?

Just like good teaching doesn't belong to just one time and one place - - -
LIKE THE DRIVEWAY OF MY HOME IN PITTSBURGH - - - Jesus doesn't
belong to one place or to one people only.

Nor does he finish all that needs doing in any one community.

Instead, he equips his followers (ALL OF YOU) to carry on his ministry
and to complete what has been left undone. We are to be his extra hands, his
extra mouths, his additional compassionate hearts - - - serving the world.

He restores people to physical and mental health so they can be
productive alongside of him; partners with him in serving the needs of others

When Simon's mother-in-law rises from her sickbed – SICK WITH A
FEVER THAT IN THOSE DAYS MEANT A SERIOUS HEALTH THREAT - - -

she doesn't just sit passively by and luxuriate in her newly-regained health. She stands up and uses her skills to serve.

Similarly, while the people in Capernaum bring to him "all who were sick or possessed with demons," we are told that Jesus only cures and cast out many - - - Why not all?

The reason is that he intends for his disciples - - - his followers - - - to work by his side. He wants them to get their hands dirty, to heal where they can and to comfort where they cannot.

Jesus never intends to be just a miracle worker - - - a spectacle for the people to gather around like Ringling Brothers Circus - - - He offers his miracles as an **invitation**, revealing his power - - - **TO EMPOWER US** - - - to be healers and teachers too.

Because of what he has shown us - - - we are to seek out what needs fixing in our communities, in our relationships, in our world and put our hands to the task of God's life-saving ministry.

Our ELCA - - - the national church to which we belong - - - has a motto these days. It says "God work - - - Our Hands"

If you think that's just words; think again.

What Jesus has taught us - - - is what we do with our lives in this world. And when we actually use our hands for God's purposes - - - when we apply

what Jesus has taught us - - - we will find that what we have received from our Lord - - - means life and health to more than we can possibly imagine.