

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, January 30, 2022

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminster, Massachusetts

Jesus, the Burden Bearer

Luke 4:31–44

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

St. Luke describes for us a day in the life of our Lord. It began in Capernaum. While **He was teaching them on the Sabbath**, a man with an unclean spirit cried out, and **Jesus rebuked him**. Then **He stood over [Simon’s mother-in-law]**, who was ill, and **rebuked her fever**. As the day ended, people came from everywhere to be healed, and **He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them**. Finally, **when it was again day, He departed and went into a desolate place** before moving on **to the other towns as well** (vv 31, 35, 39, 40, 42, 43).

What a long day. That sounds exhausting.

How did Jesus do it? How did He do it day after day, town after town, sick person after sick person? I suppose we could ask the same about Jeremiah in our Old Testament reading. How did he do it? God appointed him to be a prophet, but it would be a fight, a struggle. Day after day, year after year, he was to speak God’s word, and he would suffer for doing it. For that matter, how do we do it? Each day we take up our callings again—our relationships, our work, our serving at home, at church, and in the world. Each day we reenter the battle against sin and selfishness. Each day brings its own burdens, anxieties, and worries. It can be exhausting. How do we do it?

3.

Sometimes, of course, we don’t do it. Or we don’t do it well. Maybe we struggle even to get out of bed. The smallest tasks take enormous effort. We can’t handle another person asking us for something. We can’t handle another loss or disappointment. Sickness and bodily ailments drag us down. We find our relationships draining. Work is stressful. Having no work is stressful too. Maybe we’ve stopped caring. It happens. It happens because we are finite creatures living in a fallen world. We have our limits. Life takes a toll on us, especially when we carry the burdens, needs, and responsibility of others, as so many of us do. Sometimes it becomes more than we can bear.

It can happen to anyone, of course, but some types of work are particularly prone to these things, to burn out and compassion fatigue. Those in the “caring professions,” like health care and counseling, are especially vulnerable. So are teachers. Those who take care of sick or infirm family members are in this camp, too. Please pray for people who do these types of work. Encourage and support them. Ask how you can help. What happens in caring is that the trauma and stress of others’ situations can become our trauma and stress as well. There’s a danger that we may become emotionally and physically exhausted, completely drained, until we just don’t care anymore. There’s a cost to caring, sometimes a heavy cost. It takes a toll on our bodies and our minds.

Yet this is often what we are called to do, isn’t it? We are called to give ourselves for others and then to get up and do it all over again tomorrow. We don’t always get a choice. Sometimes these things choose us. God calls us to care for a sick spouse or a disabled child. He gives us the abilities, interest, and opportunity to help meet the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of others. He puts people into our lives who require our time and energy.

It’s worth remembering that Christians have a long history of caring for others. In the first centuries of the Church, it was said of Christians, “See how they love one another.” The faith spread because Christians cared for people that no one else would care for. They took in infants who were abandoned to die. They cared for the elderly and the sick. They showed hospitality to strangers, widows, and orphans. They welcomed the poor and slaves. If you were to look at many of the caring institutions in our society, you would find their roots in Christianity—hospitals, nursing homes, social services, pregnancy care centers, maternity homes, adoption centers, and schools for the underprivileged. Such work is hard, but it’s also good.

2.

How could they do it? How can we do it? It’s because we know Jesus. Jesus came to release the sick, the demon possessed, and the dead. He took on human flesh to bear the burdens and sorrows of life in this world. He showed love to women and children, to sinners and tax collectors, to people whose bodies were broken and whose minds were ravaged. His heart went out to the lost and the least. During His earthly ministry, He was like a walking hospital. The sick poured into His arms.

Jesus is the Son of God. He has authority over the created world and everything in it. He has authority over unclean spirits, raging fevers, and diseases of all kinds. Even the grave obeys His voice and gives up the dead when He calls. This doesn’t mean that we will see these miracles here and now. What it means is that we can bring our burdens of

care to Jesus. We can lay our sorrows on Him. We can give Him our fatigue. He's able to put it on His shoulders. He cares, even when we can't or don't know how.

We see this in the Gospel reading. **Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to [Jesus] on her behalf** (v 38). The family had been caring for her, but the time came when they made known her need to Jesus. They asked Him for help. They placed the burden on Him. Again, it says that **all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him** (v 40). At times it seems too much for us. There are things beyond our abilities. It's never too much for Him or beyond His ability. If you are weary, weighed down by care for others, then cast your cares on Him. He cares for you.

If we lean on our own strength, it will give out. Our compassion has limits. It will run dry. But He is greater than we are. Because He is true God, His strength, compassion, and love are infinite. As Isaiah said, **"Surely He has born our griefs and carried our sorrows"** (Isa 53:4)—all of them.

1.

Jesus knows the cost of caring. He pays the price of love. Every encounter with a demon demanded something of Him. Every lifting of a fever took a toll on Him. Every healing made Him familiar with pain. It may sound easy to us, but it wasn't easy. Luke says that **He laid His hands on every one of the sick** (v 40). Where do the sicknesses and the sufferings go when Jesus heals people? What happens to our burdens when we ask the Lord to carry them? What takes place when He touches people so that they are made well? What goes on when Jesus reaches into our own lives and the lives of our loved ones?

What happens is this: He takes those sufferings into Himself. He absorbs those sicknesses into His holy body. He gets weighed down with the care of those in need. It's no wonder that Jesus sometimes withdrew into desolate places or went off by Himself to pray before moving on to new places. He didn't start drinking from the cup of suffering when He knelt for prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. That's simply when He prepared to take the last gulp, to drink the bitter dregs. His suffering started at the beginning of His ministry. It started as He took the burden of sickness and death from first one person and then another.

Dear friends, this same Jesus is here for you and for those in your care. You hear His word. You receive His promises. Your burdens may be more than you can bear, but they aren't more than He can bear—day after day, town after town, sick person after

sick person. Luke describes for us one long day in the life of Jesus. That day and that work go on still.

TODAY JESUS BEARS OUR BURDEN AND CARRIES OUR SICKNESSES.

In Him, we see love in action. We witness the more excellent way of which St. Paul spoke. For Jesus is love in the flesh. Jesus is patient and kind; He does not envy or boast; He isn't arrogant or rude. He doesn't insist on His own way; He isn't irritable or resentful; He doesn't rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Jesus bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Yes, in His body, Jesus endures all of it—every fever, every cancer, every autoimmune disease, every cardiac event, you name it. He carries it in His body. He takes it to the cross, and then He rests in the tomb. Finally, He rests all the work that He came to do.

How does Jesus do it? One day, one person, one sickness, one need at a time, including yours. For He is Your God. His love never ends. His compassions never run dry. His care never fails. His mercies never come to an end. He took up the cross for your sake. He knows what it is to suffer. But He knows, too, what it is to rise from the dead.

And what about us? We take the burdens laid on us and transfer them to Jesus. And having suffered with Him, we will also be glorified with Him on the great Day of rest and joy that has no end.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7
