

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Heresy, or false doctrine, comes from pushing the truth too far.

This is how all the early church arguments went:

Jesus is true God, right?

Well, push that too far that he ceases to be true man—just a ghost.

But the other side says, “No—Jesus is true man.”

And push that too far and then you’ve lost the divinity of Christ.

Sometimes in our arguments we go too far, and we fall off the other side of the horse.

That’s just the way of sin.

And that’s what happens today in our Gospel reading.

Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law, who’s fiery fever brings her to the point of death.

This miracle of healing leads them to bring others—

“they brought to Him all who were sick or oppressed by demons” (1:32).

And eventually,

“the whole city was gathered together at the door” (1:33).

Jesus healed them, too.

“And He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons” (1:34).

Jesus has the power to heal.

That’s true.

But what happens when you push this truth too far?

The next morning, after dreaming all night about the great potential here,

about the fame and fortune at their finger tips with this miracle-working Jesus,

Peter and the others came looking for Him.

But He was gone!

Their hidden treasure was gone.

Their hopes and dreams of fame and fortune—gone!

Where?

“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, He departed and went out to a desolate place, and there He prayed” (1:35).

Jesus, the miracle-working, demon-defying, sickness-curing wonder,

was praying.

St. Peter, often the bumbling blockhead, blurts out: **“Everyone is looking for you”** (1:37).

It's as if Peter said,

“What are you doing?
 Don't you know what great good you could be doing?
 Why are you here wasting your time—
 get back to where the people are,
 get back to the crowds,
 go and make a name for yourself!”

And here we see how St. Peter is just like one of us.

He's just as addicted to honor and fame, to greatness and glory and success as we are.

And can you blame him?

He sees the potential, he recognizes the wonder of this Jesus.
 Peter knows of the great need for such a miracle-working healer.

For Peter it's all about success.

It's all about numbers.
 It's all about growth and popularity and bigger and better and best!

But not for Jesus.

Jesus responds to Peter's lust for power and prestige,

“No, let's go on to another place, that I may preach there also, for *that* is why I came out” (1:38).

Jesus came out of heaven, out of the womb of Mary—He came out to *preach*.

He didn't come to start a movement or revolution.

He didn't come to oppose the authorities,
 start a new trend,
 or gain popularity, prestige, or honor.

He didn't come even to work miracles—

He came to preach.

When we push His miraculous works too far—

when Jesus is simply the powerful miracle-worker, demon-defy-er, fever-curer,
 then we've missed the point.

Jesus came to preach.

But preach what?

Mark doesn't say here, but Luke does.

In the same passage in Luke's Gospel Jesus says,

**“I must preach *the good news of the kingdom of God* to the other towns as well;
 for I was sent for this purpose”** (Lk 4:43).

You can almost hear Peter groaning in the background.

Remember, we and Peter aren't so different.

“Preaching? Really?”

Doesn't Jesus know that people tune the preacher out—
 that they look at their watches and wonder when it's time to go?
 Doesn't He know that miracles will draw a bigger crowd?
 Doesn't He want to be successful and growing and transforming the community?

Peter's faith is misplaced.
 And so often ours is too.

We look at size and numbers and growth and success
 and think that we must add something to the preaching for the Kingdom to grow—
 whether it's cutting-edge youth programs,
 or self-help groups,
 or a change in style or delivery.
 But not for Jesus.

He came to preach the authoritative word of forgiveness.

Sure, He healed and cured and drove the demons out.
 But all this is secondary.

Jesus came to preach the forgiveness of sins.
 He came to declare the unholy to be holy,
 the unrighteous to now be righteous in the sight of God!
 He came to heal souls and remove the crushing weight of the guilty conscience.
 He came to speak oppressed people free.

And by His speaking, He spoke them into the Kingdom of God.

Yes, God is powerful.
 But His power does us no good unless He lays it all aside and goes the way of weakness.

Jesus refused to be known as the miracle-worker.
 He wanted to be known instead as the *crucified*.

That is why Jesus came, to preach His own cross,
 to proclaim His own death for the sins of the whole world,
 to declare you free.

And that's why Jesus comes again today.
 He comes again as the preacher, as the Word that enters your ear and calls you to Himself.
 He invites you again into His life, His death, and His resurrection.
 And He does it all by way of the preaching of the cross, the crucified, *for you!*

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit