

“Praise the Lord, how good it is
to sing praises to our God!” AMEN!

Think of a time in your life when
you said these words:
And so it begins.

That would be a time when
you saw something, or
did something or decided something
and then came those words,
and so it begins.

Was it the decision to go or not go to college?

Was it the time you decided to
take a career path or change one
that you'd been on?

Maybe it was a decision to
go into the military or maybe leave it
when the time came.

A decision to have children or
to not have children.

In all of these real life decisions
there was a new start;

a turning of the page in life and
a new path was becoming
your adventure.

When I was in my senior year of high school
in a small rural town in California called Salinas,
I don't really recall making the decision

to come to Tallahassee, FL to go to FSU.

There's just the memory of getting on
the plane to come here in 1988.

And so it began.

The page in life was being turned and
a new adventure started.

There's no way to know for sure, but
had that not occurred, I probably would
not have met Colleen because
we began dating while at FSU.

I would have missed out on becoming closer
to my grandmother because she was living here
in Tallahassee until she died in 1998.

So much would never have begun.

So, think of those times in your life and
then put yourself as one of Jesus' disciples in
our lesson today.

You've just been called to follow Jesus
from your previous profession and
the words of new beginnings are ringing
in your ears.

And so it begins.

Then, Jesus healed a man in
the synagogue on Sabbath.

The intimate relationship,
of which you're just introduced,
with your teacher/rabbi (Jesus) was

suddenly public and everyone
wanted a piece of him, now.

That becomes a source of conflict in your heart.

What was once a new beginning for you
is now being made clear, and
this new beginning that Jesus offered,
is open to everyone. (Pause)

Now, in the context of the gospel and

in the closing Sundays of epiphany,
we recognize a new manifestation.

By the lakeshore Jesus was manifested
in private conversations.

Then in public spaces, like in the synagogue,
Jesus healed for many to see and
then in the home of Simon Peter and Andrew,
we witness Jesus heal in a private residence.

A private, public, private encounter
that led to new beginnings and all sorts of
pages began turning for people. (Pause)

So, point one we want to recognize
the way Jesus finds us in private places,
like in our homes, as well as in public spaces,
like places of worship.

But, we know these are not
the only places where
Jesus is manifested.

Mark wants to blur our lines of distinctions
so we begin to unpack the truth that homes,
in first century Israel were family dwellings.

Neighbors often lived just a few yards
from one another.

They were intertwined in ways that really
didn't give anyone truly "private spaces."

Neighbors would have known
Peter's mother-in-law was sick with a fever.

Fevers could be deadly, but Jesus fresh
from healing on the sabbath (in public) now
comes into the residence to heal...
again on the sabbath.

And when he does, she began to serve them. (Pause)

And this is the part we need to unpack, too,
so we don't just look upon this as just
a cultural stereotype.

The word for "serve" here is the same one
used to describe what the angels did
for Jesus in the wilderness and the same
word Jesus will use when he said,

"For the Son of Man came not to be served
but to serve, and to give his life as
a ransom to many."

Serving, waiting on, and even following Jesus
to the cross are all responses to Jesus' first
coming to people.

Turning the pages of our lives and
revealing God, so it begins. (Pause)

I wonder if Jesus knew what path was
being opened up before him?

He saw for himself the people's great need.

Whether it was inside their home,
at their place of worship or
by the lakeshore.

He saw it, embraced it and healed them
but I'm not so sure he knew exactly
what it would all mean because in
the next paragraph we are told
that he suddenly left and

we are told how Simon Peter and the others
searched for him... they hunted for Jesus!

And in that place of seclusion and prayer,
I wonder, was Jesus made aware of
his page turn and path that was
being opened up to him?

His reply to Peter leads us to say, "Yes."

"Let us go to the neighboring towns,
so that I may proclaim the message there also;
for that is what I came to do." (Pause)

Jesus is always on the move.

And so it begins.

We come with our needs,
or diseases and/or our demons and
there's Jesus to heal them and
somehow allow us to turn
the page to what will come next.

(Pause)

And since we come off of a week where
we just had two funeral services right here at
St. Stephen and another at Cully's
Cemetery for a dear member
whose father died,
the Saturday before,

we are mindful of other ways
our pages in life are turned.

When a loved one dies we are forced

to evaluate what comes next, to
struggle through new responsibilities,
new roles, and doing it all while
deeply grieving.

We become part of a club that each and
everyone one of us will belong to
if we live long enough.

A grief club,
a survivor's club,
an "and so it begins club."

Whatever we call it, Jesus is there in
the private and the public spaces.

Whatever we call it, Jesus is wanting
to proclaim a message to you and to me.

A message of unity and partnership and healing...
and a message of serving
because that was what he came to do.

AMEN!