

"Healing Simon's Mother-in-Law"

Mark 1:29-39

5th Sunday Following the Epiphany, Year B

8 February 2009

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

[Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church](#)

Mark 1:29-39

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

That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. 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. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." 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." And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Prayer.

So much for dropping their nets, coming and following Jesus.

How long had Peter been following Jesus?

Two weeks, perhaps,

When into town Jesus comes

To teach in the synagogue, as we heard last week,

And immediately thereafter,

Immediately (it says in the most accurately translated texts)

Jesus is summoned to the bed of Peter's mother-in-law

Who is dying with a fever.

Simon was the dutiful disciple

Until the call of a wife and mother-in-law successfully drew him home;

And now, it drew the attention and presence of Jesus.

Go ahead,

You have my permission,

To imagine with your mind's eye

How this situation probably unfolded.

Simon and Andrew invite in Zebedee's boys – James and John.

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They invite Jesus to come
Because, holy cats, if he can teach with authority
And if he can cast out demons like he just did at the synagogue
And since his fame was spreading like wild fire throughout the region of Galilee,
Well, just maybe,
Jesus could do something for an ailing mother-in-law.
At the very least, perhaps Jesus could do something for a dutiful daughter and son-in-law.

Our imagination lures us to believe this is a story about
Characters from antiquity.
But it's not.
This is a story about you and me today.

The scene is reminiscent of Jesus throughout the Gospel
For those of us with the privilege of hindsight.
He enters the sick room
He takes the hand of the sick, dying, or dead
Lifts it up
And healing takes place.
Sickness leaves, resurrection has come.
The diseased are made well, and the dead are brought back to life.
A hemorrhaging woman, a soldier's daughter, and mother's girl, a dear friend already sealed in
a tomb:
Jesus has the power to SHA-ZAM
Make life new, all over again.

If this is a story about you and me,
I can hear you already protesting,
Where is Jesus today?
Why isn't he making my life new, all over again?
Ha, me?! How about those who are sick and dying today?
Why doesn't Jesus just stroll into the atrium of any of our hospitals and ask for attendants to go
fetch the patients, bring them to me for healing and just keep walking them right out the door?
How about the generations of those who've already died
In the 2,000 or so years since Jesus last made a house call?
They are pushing up daises, not rolling away stone doors across the street at the graveyard.

"One and done" wasn't an option for Jesus.
Because as soon as word leaked out
Everyone and their uncle showed up on the doorstep:
The sick, the dead, the possessed with demons –
Wide floods the water through normally closed gates.

He cured many who were sick
And cast out many demons;
Placing a Harry Potter type hex on the demons,
Not allowing them to speak,
Because they knew him.
Which makes me wonder,
What else did they know about Jesus
But were unable to blab?
Like the possessed man in the synagogue we heard about last week,
They knew Jesus was the Holy One of God.
He had the authority,
Not by what he knew,
But by his relationship with the Father,
To heal and cast out demons.
He has authority
Over this world
And the next.
In a Hebrew-esque sort of way,
Grumbling after being led to freedom,
We can almost imagine some of those souls
Who were now speechless, complaining,
"Give me back my demon,
because when I had the demon in me at least I could speak."
"Take the demon away, and I'm speechless."

Jesus continues to take the hand of people today
Despite the fact that he isn't physically present
To raise us up and proclaim,
"In the name of God, the Almighty, be healed, my son or my daughter.
Go and sin no more."
Through his Holy Ghost,
And through the conduit of His disciples
- that would be you and me -
Jesus continues to heal and cast out demons.
Sometimes healing is a cure.
Science and medicine,
Doctors, nurses, and therapists alike are willing partners to cures today.
Sometimes healing is a postponement
- after all, Simon's mother-in-law, the soldier's daughter, and Lazareth all lived to die another
day -
and sometimes healing means the shroud of mystery remains before our eyes, not allowing us
to see the larger, more complete picture,

which only God can know.
It is healing, nonetheless;
Whether we are privy to it or not.
Therefore, healing always implies trust,
Trust beyond anything comparable in humankind,
Trust that is only possible between the Creator and the created;
Trust that in the end,
It is God, and God alone,
Who is in control.

So, long before sunrise,
Jesus goes alone to a deserted place
And prays.
The rhythm of action and prayer,
Healing and restoration,
Of resurrection and salvation
Is a common one for Jesus.
It happens with him throughout his life,
And so, too, should it serve as a divine example
For our discipleship;
For our walk with him.
All healing is of God
And is from God.
When God has been given out,
One must return to the source,
To the well to drink in the presence and substance of God.
Jesus returns to prayer.

Just as healing is not always cure,
So, too, prayer isn't always us doing the talking.
"Be still, and know that I am God," the Lord told Moses in the wilderness.
"Shut it."
"Zip it." Mike Meyers commanded his insolent son.
Stop the movement.
Open the head.
Make room in the heart.
Make ready the soul.
Prayer is as much as becoming the vessel into which God is filling.

"Let us go on to the neighboring towns,
for that is what I came out to do,"
Jesus responds to the searching and concerned Simon.

For Jesus,
The power of healing begins personal
- it begins with Peter's mother-in-law and a boat load of others -
But through the infusion of God's power through prayer,
Jesus takes healing global.
Jesus has come to change you and me, yes.
But he's also come for the conversion of the world.
He's come to bring the Father's heavenly kingdom down
- Thy kingdom comes,
Thy will be done -
On earth as it is in heaven.

Because we can not see the future any more than looking into a mirror dimly,
As the apostle Paul would write,
We don't know (that's the mystery)
And we can't see (the reason we submit our will to our Heavenly Father's will)
The completeness of God's healing and restoration,
Either individually, or collectively.

God's ways are greater than my ways;
I don't know why, and I can't explain it.
It just means that I have to place my life into the hands of God and to trust his will completely.
Compared to what we know, so much more is unknown to us,
And remains as God's hidden mystery.
I don't know why, and I can't explain it.
It just means that we, as a people, must be content
To be the hands of Jesus healing in the world today,
And that, like him, we are to set apart time to simply stop
and pray
and be filled.

Our imagination lures us to believe this is a story only about
Characters from antiquity,
A dusty old account from history:
About Jesus, his disciples, and a mother-in-law with a fever.
But it's not.
This is a story about you and me today.
How is it going to change you?
Amen.