

## Healing Time (Mark 1:29-34)

The scripture reading for today is about Jesus' early days of ministry. Here, we find him beginning his work in Galilee. In this morning's lesson he is ministering inside Peter's house and in the very doorway of Peter's house. There we read that he cured Peter's mother-in-law and many others who were sick. He also silenced and cast out many demons.

This scripture brings back a memory from my early childhood. In it, my dad is praying, "O Lord, you cured Peter's mother-in-law. Could you please do something about my mother-in-law?" (Pause) I'm kidding. I never heard him say that. He may have thought it, but I never heard him say it.

Our Gospel reading for today found in Mark 1:29-34 has to do with healing time. It opens up by saying that "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" (Mark 1:29-30).

This scripture reading follows right on the heels of last week's lesson. In it Jesus had spent a full morning teaching in the synagogue. Next, he battled and cast out an unclean spirit. Then he entered Peter's house, but even in a private home he did not get to relax for a single minute. No sooner had he sat down and put his feet up when he was told that Peter's mother-in-law was sick with a fever.

Now, he could have said this to Simon, Andrew, James, and John. "I'm tired. I've already had a very demanding day. Couldn't this wait until tomorrow?" Jesus, however, did not say that. He was filled with pastoral care. As soon as he heard about her illness, Jesus "came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them" (Mark 1:31).

Isn't that amazing? While already tired, Jesus had the strength to perform miracles. Yes, miracles. He cured the fever of a bed-fast woman, and he enabled that woman to be one of the very first deacons. Did you hear that? The scripture says, "Then the fever left her, AND she began to serve them."

Now you would think that after this they would let Jesus alone for a while to catch his breath. Who could blame him if he told anyone else who came to him that day in need of healing to come back tomorrow after he had rested? Who could have

blamed him if he had instructed Peter to put a sign in the window saying, "Office hours over for today." However if we keep reading we see that, "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" (Mark 1:32-34a).

According to a commentary that I looked at it says that the first scene where Jesus heals the mother-in-law is a private scene. In the second healing scene it is made public. According to the commentary "People bring to Jesus 'all who were sick or possessed with demons,' and 'the whole city' gathers in the doorway. Such claims serve notice to the reader that Jesus is now a public figure" (Brueggemann, Cousar, Gaventa, & Newsome, p. 141). The commentary also says that in this Gospel passage "Jesus is sought for his power to heal, but his teaching is not acknowledged, nor is his real identity" (Brueggeman, Cousar, Gaventa, & Newsome, p. 141).

But I must confess that I find there to be something troublesome about this scripture. And I dare say it is something that has bothered all of us at one time or another in our faith journeys. This troubling thing is dealt with in a scene from the movie, "License to Wed." Reverend Frank, played by Robin Williams, is playing catch with a young man named Ben. Reverend Frank accidentally hits Ben right in the face with the baseball. Ben falls to the ground and starts moaning and bleeding. Reverend Frank rushes over to him and says, "Oh, my goodness. You okay, big fella? Let's see that. Oh, no. That's really bad."

Then Reverend Frank tries to heal him. He says, "I'm gonna have to heal you. It's healing time. Stay down." Then he begins to pray. "Oh, Lord, surround him with your light and grace. Lord have mercy! Lord have mercy! We have got to pray! We have got to pray to make it through the day!" Reverend Frank then pauses for a moment and then asks. "You're healed, right?"

To which Ben replies "Let me see. Let me see. No it's still bleeding."

Reverend Frank then says "Okay, let's go old school." He begins reciting a prayer in Latin. Then he yells, "Be gone, demon spirit! Be gone!"

Still Ben is not healed. Then Reverend Frank prays again but this time, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Lord, take him up upon your wings."

The young man objects to this funeral prayer to which Reverend Frank responds, "If you believed, you'd be healed. Do you believe? Believe!"

Ben, afraid of receiving last rites then says, "I'm healed, I'm healed, I'm healed."

Reverend Frank then says "Oh, it's a miracle! It's a miracle!" After a long pause Reverend Frank then smiles and says, "You're not healed. I'm not a doctor. I'm a pastor. You know what you need? Advil and ice. Come on. Sorry about that. You know, I have to try that stuff. Never works, but what if it had? Wouldn't that be crazy?"

That's exactly what can be so troubling about this passage. In the passage, Jesus though busy and certainly tired immediately works at healing all who are brought to him. Why doesn't that happen now? Why doesn't that happen today? Why doesn't that happen in our lives? It causes us to think like Reverend Frank. "You're not healed. Sorry about that. You know, I have to try that stuff. Never works, but what if it had? Wouldn't that be crazy?"

After all, there is so much that needs healing in our world. There is so much that is broken. There are wars. There are economic catastrophes. There are bruised and broken hearts. There are illnesses. Just ponder these words of a young person whose five younger siblings died of cholera. "Then they started to die. Prisca was first, then Sammy, then Shantel, Clopas, and Aisha, the littlest one, last."

Yes, there is so much that is broken. So much that needs healing. As a matter of fact, which one of us does not need healing right this very moment? So why is Mark giving us this story of a Jesus who right from the beginning of his ministry is found healing from morning until well past sun down? What is Mark trying to say to us about this Jesus and our world? Maybe he is saying that healing is far more than a mere cure. Consider these two examples.

In a scene from "Shadowlands," a film based on the life of C.S. Lewis, Lewis has returned to Oxford from London, where he has just been married to Joy Gresham, an American woman, in a private Episcopal ceremony performed at her hospital bedside. She is dying from cancer, and, through the struggle with her illness, she and Lewis have been discovering the depth of their love for each other. As Lewis

arrives at the college where he teaches, he is met by Harry Harrington, an Episcopal priest, who asks what news there is. Lewis hesitates; then, deciding to speak of the marriage and not the cancer, he says, "Ah, good news, I think, Harry. Yes, good news."

Harrington, not aware of the marriage and thinking that Lewis is referring to Joy's medical situation, replies, "I know how hard you've been praying .... Now, God is answering your prayer."

"That's not why I pray, Harry," Lewis responds. "I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God; it changes me." Yes, Lewis in his pain seems to have discovered a bigger and more important type of healing than he had been searching for.

And consider this example: Douglas Maurer, 15, of Creve Coeur, Missouri, had been feeling bad for several days. Mrs. Maurer took Douglas to the hospital in St. Louis where he was diagnosed as having leukemia.

The doctors told him in frank terms about his disease. They said that for the next three years, he would have to undergo chemotherapy. They didn't sugarcoat the side effects. They told Douglas he would go bald and that his body would most likely bloat. Upon learning this, he went into a deep depression.

His aunt called a floral shop to send Douglas an arrangement of flowers. She told the clerk that it was for her teenage nephew who had leukemia. When the flowers arrived at the hospital, they were beautiful. Douglas read the card from his aunt without emotion. Then he noticed a second card. It said: "Douglas - I took your order. I work at Brix Florist. I had leukemia when I was seven years old. I'm 22 years old now. Good Luck. My heart goes out to you. Sincerely, Laura Bradley."

His face lit up. "Oh wow!" he said.

It's interesting: Douglas Maurer was in a hospital filled with millions of dollars of the most sophisticated technological equipment. He was being treated by expert doctors and nurses with competent medical training. But it was a sales clerk in a flower shop, a young woman making \$170 a week, who - by taking the time to care, and by being willing to go with what her

heart told her to do - gave Douglas hope and the will to carry on. He discovered that healing was something much bigger than the disease named leukemia.

Remember, Mark also lived in a world that was broken and in need of healing. All of those wars and diseases and hungers did not vanish from the earth that day when Jesus was healing at Peter's house. But Mark may be telling us that something terribly important began that day. That in Jesus Christ God gave notice to the brokenness of the world that its days were numbered. That in Jesus Christ we are given hope and healing and love right in the very midst of life's struggles. That in Jesus Christ, hopelessness and even death have been overcome.

Mark must have known that we would be bothered by his writing of healings in a world filled with hurts and brokenness that were not yet healed. Maybe that is why there is one final part to today's story. That is when it says, "and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him" (Mark 1:34b). Theologians refer to this as the messianic secret. Jesus performs a miracle and then says to the person who he healed, "Don't tell anyone." How is it that the demons were able to know Jesus and recognize who he was but his disciples, those who were closest to him were unable? Why did Jesus not want news of his healing people to get out in the open? Was Jesus afraid that people would only come to him when they were in need of healing? Was Jesus afraid that people would get the wrong idea of who the Messiah was and the role of the Messiah? Did Jesus just want people to know that his wonderful work was only beginning? That it was far from being done?

Yes, the world in which we live is still filled with pain and brokenness. But God is not nearly finished with this world yet. Yes, there are so many things we do not yet understand, but Mark would have us understand that God is with us in Jesus and he has begun the work of healing and mending the world. Yes, there is much yet to be done. But the Good news is that God will not rest until this work of healing is completely finished once and for all. Then there will be no more tears. Then there will be no more brokenness.

To me this Gospel passage is saying very important things. First we all are in need of healing. This could be healing in terms of relationships, sicknesses, physical injuries, and spiritual demons. Second, when we are in need of healing we are all invited to come to Jesus to get that healing. Third, when we get to Jesus and ask him to heal us, Jesus will place his hands on us and give us the gift of healing that will enable us to handle anything this world can throw at us. Jesus won't turn us

away. He will let us gather outside his door. Jesus will continue to heal us throughout the day and evening. Fourth, when we receive our healing we need to do as Simon's mother-in-law did. Get up and serve. There are so many others who need Christ's precious gifts. Fifth, we all need healing time, true. But that shouldn't be the only time when we seek Jesus out. Jesus has so much more to offer us than healing. Yes, he is the great healer. But he is also the great teacher, the great leader, the Savior of the world. There is always so much more that he has to give to us.

Yes, let us seek out Jesus for healing. But let us also seek out Jesus not just for what he does, but for who he is. Remember he is known by many names. The Great Physician. The Good Shepherd. The Messiah. The Son of God. The Savior of the entire world. May we be found seeking this Jesus all of the time. He is waiting for you. He is seeking you. Thanks be to God. Amen.

-- Zachary Chamberlain Diehl; Hickman Mills Community Christian Church; February 8, 2009