

Isaiah 40:21-31  
Psalm 147:1-12, 21c  
1 Corinthians 9:16-23  
Mark 1:29-39

We encounter Jesus this morning in yet another revelation of his identity. He and the disciples are just leaving the synagogue where Jesus has successfully cast out a demon from a man in the congregation and has restored him to good health. He is himself again. Word begins to spread like wildfire about this man, Jesus and what he is able to do.

As they are walking away from the synagogue, James and John tell Jesus that Peter's mother-in-law is gravely ill. They are in Capernaum which is Simon Peter's and Andrew's hometown. The four of them have so recently joined Jesus that the fishing nets they left behind are still damp and tangled on the beach and they are still in home territory. Without comment, Jesus walks across the street from the synagogue to the home of Peter's mother-in-law where he gently takes her by the hand. The Greek word used to describe what happens next is *egeiro* which means 'to raise up.' It's the same word that is used to describe what happens when Jesus arrives to see about Lazarus and it is the same word that is used to describe what happens to him after the crucifixion. The healing of Peter's mother-in-law is the first resurrection story we hear. She is completely healed. No recuperation necessary. At once she resumes her normal life. Jesus has set her free. He has restored her to her family, to her life and to her community. For her, Jesus has put things back the way they were. But when Jesus restores, he puts things in order the way God intended. That doesn't always mean he puts things back exactly as they were.

Such is an encounter when the Kingdom of God comes near. Jesus tells us repeatedly that when he arrives, the Kingdom of God has come near...and the Kingdom of God is all things are to be the way they were intended by God.

The British author, C. S. Lewis, provides us with charming story of restoration in the Chronicles of Narnia.

A young boy names, Eustece, gets swept up in a fantasy that takes him to an unknown land. While there, he seeks refuge in the cave of a dragon who has died. In the cave, he discovers golden coins and priceless jewels that he greedily stuffs into his pockets. Such behavior is not unknown to Eustece. He comes to this adventure with something less than a sterling reputation. While in the cave, he falls asleep. When he awakes, he discovers that he has turned into a dragon. Anxious to shed the cumbersome dragon skin, he peels it off like a snake shedding its skin, but it grows back immediately.

Frantic to be rid of the dragon skin, he continues trying to peel it off himself, but to no avail. In the midst of his frustration, He looks up to see a huge lion coming slowly toward him and he is terribly afraid. He shut his eyes tight, but it doesn't do any good because the lion tells him to follow it.

Eustece asked for the lion's help, but the lion told him that he must first undress, but he knew he couldn't because he had already tried to shed his skin. And here's how the story unfolds:

***"Then the lion said: "You will have to let me undress you." I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it.***

***"The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off. You know — if you've ever picked the scab of a sore place. It hurts like crazy but it is such fun to see it coming away."***

***"Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off — just as I thought I'd done it myself the other three times, only they hadn't hurt — and there it was lying on the grass, only ever so much thicker, and darker, and more knobbly-looking than the others had been. And there was I smooth and soft as a peeled switch and smaller than I had been. Then he caught hold of me — I didn't like that much for I was very tender underneath now that I'd no skin on — and threw me into the water. It smarted like anything but only for a moment. After that it became perfectly delicious and as soon as I started swimming and splashing I found that all the pain had gone from my arm. And then I saw why. I'd turned into a boy again. . . ."<sup>1</sup>***

Restoration is joy-filled, but not without some anxiety and trepidation at the beginning, no matter how desperately we want it. And sometimes restoration doesn't come in the way we expect. Sometimes it's very painful.

Think about all the people waiting at the door watching Jesus heal their friends and their neighbors. At some point, Jesus withdraws back into the house. He hasn't taken care of everyone. It must have been a huge disappointment to those who watched, but were not healed. The human side of Jesus made it impossible for him to be all things to all people at all times. In his human form, he was constrained by time and space and human need. God had become one of us in Jesus who had the power of God and the limitations of human beings.

To restore himself, Jesus often retreated from the crowds and even from his disciples to spend time alone. It was time with God. He prayed. He thought. He listened for God's word. He was still. He got his batteries recharged in the process of that time alone. Perhaps the very human Jesus was an introvert. We sometimes think of introverts as people who don't like to socialize or be around people. That's actually not the case. Introverts like being with people very much, but they get their energy restored in time alone while extroverts get their energy restored by being around people. It's the source of your energy that determines whether you are an introvert or an extrovert. When the disciples finally find Jesus, he appears to be restored indeed because he announces to them that they are on their way to proclaim the Gospel throughout Galilee. After his taxing day in the synagogue, what must have been an emotional healing of Peter's mother-in-law and the throngs of people he healed during the evening, Jesus is ready to go the next day...completely restored himself.

We can relate to those who must have felt disappointed when Jesus didn't heal them in the doorway of the home in Capernaum. There were just so many of them. The whole town had flocked to see Jesus and the time ran out. We know what it is like to have to wait for what we want. We know what it is like to pray endlessly for something that we feel we need and cannot get. We are reminded that other faithful people have struggled with the same disappointment when we listen to the prophet Isaiah in our first reading this morning. Isaiah speaks to the people of Israel during their exile in Babylon. They are lamenting their predicament and are wondering where God is. Has he forgotten them? Has he forgotten us? Does God not know about their situation? Does he know ours? Does God no longer love them? Does God still love us? Where is God? These are questions we all ask from time to time. It's part of the human condition. God's ways are not our ways. And God's timing is not our timing. Perhaps the key for us is the message in this passage from Isaiah that we also heard this morning.

“The Lord is the everlasting God,  
The Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary;  
His understanding is unsearchable.  
He gives power to the faint,  
And strengthens the powerless.  
Even youths will faint and be weary,  
And the young will fall exhausted;  
But those who wait for the Lord shall  
Renew their strength,  
They shall mount up with wings like  
Eagles,  
They shall run and not be weary,  
They shall walk and not faint.”

Perhaps it is our willingness to wait on the Lord that allows our faith to build. Perhaps the secret is in the waiting. The strength is in the waiting. The restoration is in the waiting. As much as it seems to us that nothing is happening, God never fails us. Waiting is hard. It is anxiety producing. It can be scary. It is almost always frustrating. Not knowing what comes next can be painful. That's what transformation is all about. When we allow God to transform us, we don't know what comes next. And we don't know how long it will take. But it is in the waiting that we are restored.

The restoration that Jesus showed us...the restoration of God...is not necessarily in putting things back the way they were, but in setting things as God intended them to be. Such is the Kingdom of God.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.