

Mark 1:29-39 and 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Last week we heard how Jesus cast out the demon from the man in the synagogue. It is still the same day when Jesus goes with his four disciples to the home of Andrew and Simon (who we later know as Peter). Simon's mother-in-law is extremely ill. She may have had malaria according to some of the reading I have done, but we don't really know. When Jesus went to her, he reached out his hand and raised her up, not just a simple assistance, but according to the Greek it is the same word used when Jesus rose from the grave. She was given new life. I think some of us women may not appreciate that the new life she was given was used to immediately take care of her guests, but in that culture, it was what she would have wanted to do. You see, she was the oldest female in the house, in her culture it was an honor to care for the family, and that meant that *her* expectations were met when she was able to wait on and serve the people who lived there. It is what made her happy, what made her life important. When news of this healing miracle spread, Jesus became the go to person. So at sunset, after the Sabbath had ended, people came to see Jesus for healing.

Illness can often lead to isolation. Almost everyone experienced the feeling of isolation in 2020 when COVID brought mandatory distancing, and limited interaction with others. Many people who weren't used to spending their days at home were forced to be alone for hours on end. Some people took the time to learn new hobbies, some to watch tv shows that they couldn't watch when they worked, and others took the time to look inside themselves and heal the hurts they had been ignoring due to their busyness. Keeping busy is a way to dull the pain, it's like self-medicating without using drugs or alcohol, and it never reaches the true cause of the pain so there is never healing. When the COVID vaccine was first available there were long lines snaking through the drugstore or clinics. With people staying 6 feet apart, I'm told in the warmer climates the line sometimes even went out through the doors onto the sidewalk and wrapped around the building.

That is what it would have been like at Simon's house minus the 6 feet in between. People from the entire town were waiting for Jesus to heal them and cast out the demons; and he didn't stop until the morning when he got up, left, and went to the deserted place where he himself could find a time of prayer and self-healing. Even Jesus took time to be by himself to communicate with his Father, to better understand what was required of him while he was in the world.

The disciples searched for Jesus. When they found him they told him that everyone was looking for him. It doesn't say they needed healing, it simply says 'everyone was searching for you'. Jesus gave them what may be a surprising response, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came to do."

On one of the podcasts I listen to, Lectionary Lab Live, they suggested that perhaps this unexpected response is the gospel writer Mark's way of showing Jesus resisting temptation. The temptation to go back to the city of Capernaum and be held in esteem and celebrated by the people whom he had healed. If Jesus was about self he could have said, "I will go back, heal a lot of people, and this ministry will grow. And we'll be well spoken of." Instead, he said, "Let's go. Let's go where I've not been heard about so that I can proclaim the message that the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe... for that is what I came to do." Jesus kept his mind on what he was called to do. And that is what he did. Jesus walked away from the temptation of fame and pride.

Even in his power Jesus was humble. We are called to be humble. In the letter from Paul to the Corinthians we heard that Paul becomes like those whom he is with so that he can reach those around him and bring them to Christ. He says he can be outside the law. That isn't to be taken literally, we are not free from the law, we aren't to turn to the unhealthy habits of others so that we can be like those who practice them, we are to find a balance in the law of Christ in order to bring people to Christ. We are to extend ourselves out of our comfort zone in order to introduce them to Jesus. Some people may take this to the extreme, thinking that being humble means they are to put themselves down, to think less of themselves, to consider themselves a martyr. Which may lead to them acting in a passive aggressive way. To demonstrate this the same podcast I mentioned before asked, "How does a southern mother change a lightbulb? She says, 'Don't mind me; I'll just sit in the dark.'" Or when there's work to be done, "Don't mind me. You go on. I'll just stay here and clean up the dishes." This isn't what Paul is saying. He is saying, consider the needs of others. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. M. Scott Peck defines love as the will to extend yourself for the benefit of yourself or others. This isn't how our society works. This is countercultural.

The change in our society can be mapped by the magazines that have evolved .... Once there was a magazine named Time, then Life, followed by People, then Self and now kids don't even use magazines, they have TickTock and Instagram where they put videos of themselves out to the world to see how many followers they can get, how many people are interested in them. Jesus wasn't looking to draw attention to himself, he was looking to draw people into the Kingdom. Paul is calling us to willingly relinquish our human freedoms for the benefit of the other. Paul finds blessings as he shares the blessing of the gospel with others.

When we live only for ourselves, our lives are sterile and unfulfilling. When we give ourselves in service to others, our lives have meaning and purpose. Jesus took time for prayer and Jesus took time for people. Yet Jesus found the time to fulfill the purpose for which he came. Jesus came to preach the good news of the reign of God in human life. Healing and helping were important to Jesus, but his primary task was to witness to the truth of God. As Christians we are the hands and feet of Jesus and our mission is to provide a witness to God in our community. The greatest need people have is to be reminded of their dignity as human beings because Christ died for them, and Christ's Spirit is available to them. We cannot follow Jesus and ignore the needs of the poor, the hurting, the desperate at our doorstep and around the world, but our primary purpose is to spread the good news of the kingdom of God. We cannot do this without drawing closer to God and finding our strength in him. Jesus did this by drawing away to a deserted place to pray.

I am so glad that Jesus believed in prayer, because I need prayer in my life. I'm so glad that Jesus cared about people, because I'm a person and you are a person, and even though we are imperfect people, it is life-changing to know that the Son of God gave his life for us. But I'm also glad that Jesus held to his primary purpose of preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God. For over 2,000 years this Gospel has been proclaimed--and because it has been proclaimed--the hungry have been fed--the sick have been ministered to--the world can find a pocket of compassion in a society that celebrates individual fame.

All glory be to God.