



Deering Community Church

Pastor: Barbara Luckett Currie

“Then the Fever Left Her, and She Began to Serve Them.”

Sermon for 2-5-2012

Scripture: Mark 1:29-39

We are still in the first chapter of Mark. What a busy day Jesus has had! Let's take a look at what has happened since last Sunday's reading. We left Jesus at the synagogue after preaching his first sermon and casting out an unclean spirit. The folks were impressed—"He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." We are told that his fame is spreading throughout the surrounding region of Galilee. As soon as they left the synagogue, Jesus went to the house of Simon Peter and Andrew, accompanied by John and James. The first thing he is greeted with is that Simon's mother-in-law is in bed with a serious fever. Jesus immediately went to her, took her by the hand and the fever left her. She got up and fixed them dinner. (We'll get back to that in a few minutes.) As the day progressed and sundown came—the end of Sabbath--the whole city was gathered around the door of Simon's house. Jesus cured many of them their diseases and cast out many demons. Hopefully he got a few hours of sleep. We are told that he got up early while it was still dark and went out to a deserted place for prayer. He needed to have some time alone for conversation with God. Soon his disciples found him, and off he went to the neighboring towns to proclaim the message of the Kingdom—"as that is what I came out to do." (Mk.1:38)

Praying, preaching and healing seem to be the essence of Jesus in this first chapter of Mark. In fact even though Mark is the shortest gospel, it has the highest proportion of miracle stories. These stories, usually told with great detail, make the listener aware of the extraordinary power of God manifested in Jesus.



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This is the first of two worship services where I will focus on healing. Next Sunday the Deacons and I will offer a specific healing ritual at the end of my sermon, including the laying on of hands. Today I want us to explore what healing is all about. Many of the stories in our Bible show Jesus curing people from specific diseases. When I talk about healing, I most often have in mind spiritual healing, which may or may not cure one's disease. People who are suffering from a terminal illness may not get rid of that illness through prayer or from laying on of hands; however, they often can get the kind of peace that makes their ability to handle recovery and/or death a lot easier. One of my colleagues says that healing involves touch that transforms cells and intimacy that transforms souls (Bruce Epperley). No issue is too small for God's attention. I believe that prayers and rituals can activate divine energy that then helps make both individuals and communities whole or healed.

I wonder what your reaction was to the sentence that I have chosen for my sermon title: Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. When I first paid attention to this sentence—many years ago—it was upsetting to me. My thinking was, 'Look at that, the poor woman has been sick and as soon as she starts feeling better the men expect her to get up and take care of them.' Now I look at this scene in a different way. Mark does not share with us how long this woman had the fever or how severe it was. I know in the ancient times, fever was much more serious than today, and it often was a symptom of an illness that would lead to death. The Greek word used here for "to serve" is diakoneo, the verb meaning to wait upon or tend to or to serve. This is where the word Deacon comes from and interestingly it is the same word used by Jesus to describe his own ministry in Mark 10:45. Peter's mother-in-law is not someone whose whole life revolves around serving men. She has an important role of



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hospitality and service in the community. Some call her the first character in Mark's gospel to show true discipleship.¹

So when some one was seriously sick, that person was not only deprived of earning a living but even more important they were prevented from assuming their rightful role/place in their community. I like the way Sarah Henrich explains that this woman's calling was to show hospitality to guests in her home. "Cut off from that role by an illness cut her off from doing that which integrated her into her world. Who was she when no longer able to engage in her calling? Jesus restored her to her social world and brought her back to a life of value by freeing her from that fever. It is very important to see that healing is about restoration to community and restoration of a calling, a role as well as restoration to life."²

Some scholars say that in Scripture, touch is a metaphor for intimacy, for presence, for relationship. Maybe the reason for incarnation was that God knew the human need for touch, for nearness, for intimacy. Jesus is the incarnation of God's love and so are we. Never forget that for some people you and I are the only Christ they will ever meet!!!

In most groups including churches there are two types of people: those who are in need of care and those who feel a call to help those in need in a certain way. Any of us can be in either group and sometimes in both groups at once. At this point I would like you to take the 3 x 5 card from your bulletin and take a couple of minutes of silent thought before writing down at least one way you are in need of help or one way you feel called to help others—or you could write down one of each. I would like to have you sign your name so I might follow up by putting together those who have a need with one who feels called to help with such a need. Try to be as specific as possible.

¹ Sarah Henrich, Commentary on the Gospel from *Working Preacher*, online.

² Ibid.



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Some examples: “I feel lonely and would like someone to visit me.” Or “I need someone who can help me understand my Medicare statements,” and on the other side “I have extra time and would like to help with household tasks for those who are not able to do them.” Or “I feel called to visit those that are housebound and would like company.” Some of you may say you are not needy, nor do you feel called to do things for others right now as you are already too busy. I think you have heard me say many times that it is okay to say No. Remember that Jesus had to leave the crowds and get some time for himself. On the other hand, I think our lives are improved as we are able to do something for others.

Will you let yourself be taken by the hand and lifted up? How will you reach out and lift others up for healing? Some of us have many needs; some of us have many talents. I believe everyone has something they are called to do to help God’s healing in this broken world. Please let me know if I can help you discern what that calling may be for this time in your life. Knowing this congregation, many of you have already located that place where your passion meets the deep needs in the world. I celebrate all of you who do so much. Amen