

“What Simon’s Mother-in-Law Does *Next*”

and Other Lessons from
Mark 1:29-39 NRSV

From the Front Pew of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois
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This week’s sermon will have three points, to make up for last week’s sermon which was pointless.
(Ha, ha.)

1.) Isolation and Community

What isolates people from one another? Language; in the train station in Paris, my poor family didn’t know which metro to take to our hotel. *Polly voo Angles?* No. No. No. We were getting desperate. My boys and wife and I were in a sea of people, all alone. Race often separates us from one another. A pothole in a crosswalk separates our friend in the wheelchair from everyone who walks. Pandemic isolates everybody.

And illness.

In the case of Simon Peter’s mother-in-law, she was in the bed and was isolated from her guests, unable to participate in the Sabbath, out of commission.

We find in scripture countless examples of how Jesus refuses to obey the social mores that keep people isolated and divided. Jesus, in fact, said that was his mission. *I want to welcome IN everybody who is left OUT.*

- The poor,
- the people in jail,
- the blind,
- the oppressed

I want to meet them and everyone else who is ostracized and cut out.^[1]

Some people read this text and see only one miracle. Simon’s mother-in-law is healed. That’s a miracle. But that Jesus seeks, finds, touches, cares about, visits, and connects with the isolated woman in the first place is another miracle.

That’s point number one. Isolation keeps us from being part of the community. Jesus seeks to bridge that isolation. Jesus visits the isolated, heals them, clears the way for them to return to the community.

When the rest of our culture avoids you, Jesus will not. If the chemo makes it nearly impossible for you to lift yourself out of a hot bath tub, if you’re not making the grade in math class or in life, if you’re paralyzed because you cannot forgive or cannot love or cannot ask for help or cannot help somebody else, if you are part of the “out crowd”—Jesus has got your number and Jesus is seeking, calling, reaching for *you*.

Jesus notices and reaches for those who are isolated from the community.

2. Noticing What Simon Peter’s Mother-in-Law Does Next.

Simon Peter's mother-in-law is healed and the story could stop there. But it doesn't.

It's not over. *Notice what Simon Peter's mother-in-law does next.* After being healed, she gets up and she serves others. Because she has been served, she seeks to serve.

The Greek word for this kind of service is where we get our word "deacon" from. Deacons are called upon to visit the sick, to befriend the homebound, and to care about mission, outreach, and ministries of hospitality.

We are called to celebrate this miracle of healing. We are called to worship the God who makes the dead rise again. We can bask in the warm light of this good news. Alleluia!

But that's not enough. We are called to serve. Like Simon's mother-in-law, we are called to rise up from our sick bed and serve others.

That's the second point: because we have been loved, healed, reached out to, we are called to do the same *in the name of the one* who first loved us.

3.) Tote that Barge, Lift that Bale

Service, however, can wear us out. The world's needs never stop. There's more to do than we can do.

Look at poor Jesus.

During the Sabbath, a time of REST, Jesus heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law. At sundown, at the second when the Sabbath ends, the disciples brought those who were emotionally and physically ill to Jesus. We get the impression that Jesus worked into the night. We get the impression that many people came to him, that the line of people stretched out the door and round and round the block. We get the impression that his work never really ended.

The next day, Jesus went off to the next town to teach, preach, heal. It appears that every slot on Jesus' calendar is filled. When we see Jesus, he's often busy: busy being born, a busy 12-year-old teaching in the temple, busy healing, busy traveling, busy being betrayed, busy dying.

But take note. Here's something that we find snippets of in scripture, and here in particular, that we will miss if we don't pay attention. It begins (and ends) in verse 35: *In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.*

Jesus knew that he needed every day to rest, to restore, to pause, to recharge, to pray. So, in this text, early in the morning, before the light of day, (after, we hope, a good night's rest) Jesus paused. Jesus prayed.

There's a bumper sticker I love that says this: Act busy: Jesus is coming.

If we're too busy, we'll never notice Jesus, we'll never hear his call, we'll never see his smile, we'll miss his "high five," we'll not hear his stern words of correction, we'll miss his corny jokes.

"Be still," the psalmist says, "and know that I am God."

Jesus understood this. And he wants us to understand it too. This is the third point: Without being centered in God, our busyness amounts to little more than just running around, and around, and around.

Conclusion: A sermon with three points:

1.) Jesus seeks those who are isolated and breaks down the walls that separates them from others.

2.) We are called to service. As we have been served, loved and healed, we are called to do likewise.

3.) In very busy lives full of work, we are called to holy rest. In the midst of running around, we are called each day, each week, each season to make time for rest and prayer.

Might God help us.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Amen.

Affirmation of Faith

(Question & Answer #1, The Heidelberg Catechism)

Q.1. What is your only comfort, in life and in death?

A. That I belong---body and soul, in life and in death---not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil; that he protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

^[1] Luke 4: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.