

“Healed to Serve”  
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 Old Stone Presbyterian Church ~ Lewisburg, WV  
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Mark 1: 29 - 39

29As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. 32That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. 35In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” 38He answered, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.” 39And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Just before today’s reading begins,  
 Jesus is in the synagogue, teaching and healing, on the Sabbath.  
 It is here, Mark tells us, that Jesus’ fame  
 begins to spread.

Jesus and the disciples leave the synagogue and go to the home of Simon and Andrew,  
 where Simon’s mother-in-law is ill.

Ill with what? We don’t know.

We’re told she has a fever, but that could be any number of things,  
 from serious to inconvenient,  
 maybe something like today’s flu,  
 but the inclusion of the word for fever is significant.

Jesus does something as significant in return.

He takes Simon’s mother-in-law by the hand, and she is healed.<sup>1</sup>

To signify her healing, Simon’s mother-in-law,  
 whose name we never get to know,  
 begins to serve them.

On the surface this can seem a bit odd,  
 She should have been given time to recuperate.  
 Time to rest.

Maybe the disciples should be serving her?

But the language of the Greek offers insight,  
 her serving them is not an obligation,  
 it is a ministry.

It is the same root as the word for deacon.

Not only does this demonstrates the dramatic nature of her recovery,

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<sup>1</sup> While not quoted directly, I relied heavily on Mark Davis’ translations and reflections in writing this sermon:  
<http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2015/02/the-holy-one-in-unholy-places.html>

I believe it also demonstrates the significance of knowing and living into vocation.

Preaching professor Karoline Lewis writes:<sup>2</sup>

what if the healing of Simon's mother-in-law was bringing her back to be the mother she always was and that she always wanted to be? And in being brought back to *who* she was, she became a disciple, called to minister, to serve, like the angels did for Jesus in the wilderness and like the Son of Man, who did not come to be served but to serve? Have you ever felt like God has brought you back from the brink ... to yourself? That you were called back from a place that was not fully you, to be you?

*That you were called back from a place that was not fully you, to be you?*

Mark then tells us that many who are sick, many who are described as possessed, having heard what happened at the synagogue earlier that day, arrive at the house, asking Jesus to heal them.

What was sickness like in the 1<sup>st</sup> century of the Common Era? Unlike today when we think about a sickness being a disease of the body, in Jesus' time sickness, illness was something of the soul that resulted in separation from regular society. Healing therefore wasn't just about a person getting well, it was about restoring them to their place in the community.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus has healed Simon's mother-in-law of a fever, and she is restored to her place in the social fabric, serving without fear, being among people without them fearing her.

Simon's Mother-in-Law is what we are called by God to be. People who serve.

A few weeks ago, for committee night, I told those who were attending the story of a church that also tried to start a committee night.<sup>4</sup>

This church planned a meal, conversation, a rich tapestry of everything that it meant to be church. The priest in charge set the tables for 50 people.

Twelve showed up the first night. But as they were sitting down to dinner, "a gregarious child from the neighborhood who noticed the lights were on and wandered in." They welcomed her, but then they looked around at their potluck fare. Kale salad. Quinoa. Pecans and avocados. Nothing a child would find appealing.

They found a partial bag of pizza pockets at the back of the freezer and cooked them. The girl ate them, and they all resolved to bring more people the next week to increase the numbers.

The next week it was the girl from the neighborhood who brought friends. Someone had gotten some more food in the freezer, so at least there was

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<sup>2</sup> Karoline Lewis, *On Being Restored to Yourself*, Sunday, February 01, 2015 12:11 PM.

<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3520>

<sup>3</sup> <http://books.google.com/books?id=xxOGViLco-UC&lpg=PP1&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false> Pages 368, 350. Found in Brian Stoffregen's exegesis of this passage <http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/mark1x29.htm>

<sup>4</sup> *Clarke French Chapel Hill, North Carolina* <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2016-08/feast>

something for the kids to eat.

The priest wrote, “The children started to join us at evening prayer. They weren’t familiar with our church and didn’t have parents there to hush them. Many had names that sounded altogether unlike the names of our children. They didn’t know rules like “don’t play the piano” or “the kitchen is for grown-ups.” After dinner they would roam the halls and poke their heads into our meetings.

It was the beginning of the end. Attendance from the members decreased. Tension about these guests increased. And there were fewer people to do the work of preparing dinner for the guests. Committee night was cancelled. The kids were told there would be no more dinners.

But the next Wednesday, the priest “heard the telltale stomping in the hallway above his office. In the kitchen, he found two eight-year-olds cooking ramen noodles on a stove. They smiled at him and blurted out, “We brought our own food! Would you like some?”

And the next week, they were outside the locked kitchen door, happily munching uncooked ramen noodles. Again, offering to share.

He says that he doesn’t remember the exact moment when he figured out the extent of his shortsightedness, but when it finally hit him, he could hardly breathe. They had been so focused on what they wanted, they had completely ignored the opportunity to serve, the need for the church that stood right in front of them. The priest concluded his story, “I’m not exactly sure what the menu will be like at the eternal banquet, but I hope it includes ramen. Or pizza pockets. I also hope I’m there to help keep the feast.”

The call to serve is one we take seriously. You’ll see it on display here at the table in a few moments. When we tell the story of Jesus, who took bread, broke it, and served it to his disciples. On the same night when he washed their feet.

And then the elders of this congregation. The leaders. The ones called by God and installed here in this sanctuary will serve the bread and the juice that they have prepared.

So that we can go out into the world, instructed and inspired by Jesus to serve others.

We are forgiven and set free so that we can follow Jesus.

In our own individual lives

We are healed so we can serve in the ways that God has called us.

As a community. A church. A church charged with a mission. To serve.

How is Old Stone serving, and where is God calling us to serve?

What needs are just outside our doors or down the street?

Those are questions we are asking. These are questions we are praying.

What do you hear God saying?

It is evening when these healings happen.

The sun has slipped, the Greek says.

You can imagine the gathering,

for we are told the whole city was at the door, going late into the night.

And before it is light again, while it is still very dark,

Jesus has gone to a solitary place to pray.

To do what so many of us think we can do along the way,  
 in the midst of everything else,  
 but which even Jesus needs time set aside to do,  
 claiming time to cultivate the spiritual gifts of  
 listening, discerning, opening ourselves to God's will.

There, Jesus is found.

Hunted, the NRSV tells us, and that's not too far off.  
 They have diligently pursued him.

Only Jesus doesn't go where they ask.

He doesn't go back.

He goes forward to continue doing what he has been doing,

Living this message of love and forgiveness, redemption and mending, hope and service.

Where are you in need of healing? Of restoration?

So you can be YOU, the You God created you to be.

Where are we, Old Stone Presbyterian Church in need of healing? Of restoration?

How can we be the church God created us to be?

What new things are happening?

And where are these things already happening, in your, in our, midst,

waiting to be expanded, encouraged, enabled?

Do we have the courage to live into it? To do this hard, messy, good work?

As Sara Bareilles<sup>5</sup> sings

"Maybe there's a way out of the cage where you live  
 Maybe one of these days you can let the light in  
 Show me how big your brave is  
 Say what you want to say, and let the words fall out  
 Honestly, I want to see you be brave."

It's what Jesus asks of us.

Us. Simon's mother-in-law

The people at the door, yearning for tomorrow to be different.

The disciples in pursuit of a Jesus they do not completely understand.

Jesus did not change them, he restored them,

to be themselves

and then to go and do likewise.

And so he does it for us, too.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.sarabmusic.com/music/brave/>