

Sermon
St. Mary Nanoose Bay
February 4, 2018
Mark 1:29-39

Last week, from the gospel of Mark, we heard the story of a *man* healed *in the synagogue*. Today, the disciples leave that same synagogue with Jesus in tow. They go to Simon's home where his mother-in-law is sick in bed with a fever. Jesus heals her. So this week's story is about a *woman* being healed; *out in the community*.

Jesus is proclaiming through word and action that the message of God's love and forgiveness is not contained to religious people in religious places. In fact, after he has healed Simon's mother-in-law, Mark tells us that the whole town gathers around the door of Simon's home. And Jesus heals many of those who need healing. Jesus' message is for anyone who is open to hear.

In this same passage we're told that in the early morning Jesus escapes to a quiet place to pray. His disciples "hunt for him" and when they find him, they tell him "Everyone is searching for you."

Jesus' response is not to return to those people. His decision is to move on. To proclaim the message and heal in towns and synagogues down the road.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus is always on the move; there's a sense of urgency to his message and his actions. He has a lot of ground to

cover; places to go, people to see. And the time to do it in feels limited. There's no time to waste.

For me, this passage creates a tension within me; a sense of weight; of pressure. There's so much to do and so little time to do it in. This is a tension that I'm often aware of and it's easy for me to take on more than I really can. And I'm not only referring to my short life as a priest. But to my experience in life, in general.

So I reflect on my recent experience of getting the flu and being laid low for a good two weeks after Christmas. Sure, I can blame my illness on the sniffing, sneezing woman I sat beside flying down to Arizona for my annual clergy retreat, but honestly, I was run down and probably susceptible to any bug around.

Unlike Simon's mother-in-law, my fever was not life threatening. And all I needed was time to recover; and the loving care my brother and his wife lavished on me likely helped as well.

When we look at the part of the story where Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law, we learn that her healing was immediate. It wasn't that Jesus cured the fever and then she needed time to recuperate; she was made well *as soon* as he lifted her up. And what happened next? "She began to serve them." This response bothers many people. They say, "She probably was sick because she was worked to the bone; and then as soon as Jesus heals her, she goes right back to being a slave – she starts serving again."

But the Greek word used here for “serve” is *diakoneo*. Which is the same word used for what Jesus came to do. Jesus came to serve. In other words, Simon’s mother-in-law’s response to being healed by divine energy is to “pass it on.” To proclaim the gospel message in action. In this way, we can understand “to serve” as the response to being open to the divine – when we are filled with what will come to be known as the ‘holy spirit,’ we will naturally and joyfully want to pass it on.

There’s a reminder in this for me. And that is - it is *God* who heals and awakens and energizes. If I rely on my own devices, on what I think “should” do, I will strain my energy. Or if I labour under the illusion that I can be the only person who can get the job done, or let others believe I am, I am going to get into trouble.

That’s why I believe Mark includes the lines in this short story that tell of Jesus going to a quiet place to pray. Jesus needs time to be quiet, to connect with God, to be re-charge. We all do. But do we take the time?

When we get tired, when we are overwhelmed by the “whole city gathered around the door” asking for help, we can fall into the trap of believing it is all up to us to fix. We forget that it is God who leads and God who feeds us. Sure, we have our own small part to play. Everyone does. And together, in a way we can’t see ourselves, all the parts make a whole and God is moving to redeem everything.

We have to listen carefully to the words in today's passage when the disciples look for Jesus who has gone off to pray. They say to him, "Everyone is searching for you." It's important to remember that whatever we do and say, that it points to the One people are searching and yearning for – God. Not us.

The best way I know for keeping check on my illusions of grandeur is to pay attention to my feelings. When I'm uncomfortable or resentful, doing things because I think I *have* to, I can tell I'm definitely not in the flow of divine energy. I'm constricted and pushing to make things happen. And because that's how I've lived much of my life, it's easy to fall back into this trap.

The more I have the experience of the ease that comes from living in the divine flow and relying on God for help, the more I can trust that it's not up to me to save the world. I just have my little, but important, part to play. Prayer is key; time alone with God is crucial. Guidance is what I'm after.

Jesus shows us this balance of action and prayer; of time in the synagogue and time in the larger community; the balance of community and solitude.

And Mark tells us today that the message of Jesus is not to be contained to the religious – it is to go out into the community; to be shared with all. When we leave church on Sunday, our worship is meant to continue, in the living out of our daily lives.

People can do amazing things; work incredibly hard, when they are in the divine flow. I think we've all had experiences like that; when God has held us up when the going got tough.

We can't always tell from the outside whether someone is working from a constricted idea of having to do something out of a sense of obligation, or whether they are being guided by God and serving willingly, but really, most of us do both to varying extents. But we all know from the inside the difference between the two. One kind of action flows from a sense of abundance and joy; the other, from resentment and not trusting that God can manage better than we can.

Being on the receiving end of these two kind of energies tells us a lot about which serves life. Freely received and given energy is easy to be around; constricted "I have to do this all on my own" kind of energy is not particularly enjoyable to be around.

It's all about experimenting and learning. As a priest I am learning a lot about balancing a role with my authenticity; about meeting my own needs as well as others. I really enjoy this learning. I'll never get it perfect. That's not the point. The point is to be open to how God is guiding me.

Going back to my time in Arizona earlier in January. The amazing thing in retrospect, is that my time being ill was a very rich time. I had time with my brother in a way I haven't had in decades; we had the time to share stories from our past and talk

about our current lives. I also had lots of time to rest; which I needed. I had time to reflect; uninterrupted time, punctuated by restorative sleep.

Who knows why we get the experiences we do? We don't have much control over that part of life. But we do have the power over our responses, our willingness to learn, our openness to change.

We can move on, like Jesus, with Jesus, to new places, new people, to try new things and offer ourselves in ways that serve God and others, and don't deplete us.

After all, today we heard "Everyone is searching for God," so we are not alone in our yearning for God. We need to take time to nurture our relationship with God. And then our lives will speak and point to God by the joy and willingness with which we serve. As a musician I really like, Jana Stanfield says, "I cannot do all the good that the world needs. But the world needs all the good that I can do."

Amen.