

Hopkins South Monterey

United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon

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Pastor Kelsey

Mark 1:29-39

29 As soon as they^a 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. **31** He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. **33** And the whole city was gathered around the door. **34** And 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.

35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. **36** And Simon and his companions hunted for him. **37** When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." **38** He 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." **39** And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Prayer & Sermon

*Gracious and Loving God,
Thank you for this time to be together. Thank you for this time with you. Bless this time we have to spend with your Word. Help us to hear what you know we need to hear, and help us to put what we learn about you and ourselves into action. In the name of the Son and Spirit, Amen.*

Upon first reading this passage from Mark 1:29-39, it is easy to categorize it as just a healing story, one of the many we have throughout the Gospels. It is also all too easy to fall into wanting to dismiss it for reminding us of the strong messages in our

modern society that a woman's place is only to serve. For crying out loud, Simon's mother-in-law, who doesn't even get a name!, can't even almost die to get out of having to get in the kitchen, make a sandwich, and serve the pack of teenage boys, AKA the disciples. Yeah, this is one of those passages that our modern mindsets can make the scripture leave a bad taste in our mouths. (All of the times over history this text and others like it have been used to perpetuate stereotypical gender roles, of course don't help.)

Good news! If we spend a couple more moments reading the text on the page, and telling our modern culture to take a coffee break for a minute, this passage has some really good things to say about what it means to be a Christian disciple. The way that this healing story plays out tells us some important aspects to serving through Jesus's action and Simon's Mother-in-law's response. The key to this story is that Jesus serves in healing and that healing leads to Simon's Mother-in-law responding by reflecting that service by serving others. Healing service begetting service. One of the things that makes this healing story unique is that it is happening on the Sabbath, after Jesus and a few of the disciples left the synagogue. That alone tells us that this is a healing to pay attention to, it is work being done on the day the law says no one should be doing any form of work. Jesus recognizes that the healing of Simon's Mother-in-law and the others that come after are more pressing than any rules or laws. From the beginning of this story, we are being reminded that doing the work of serving people is not a rigid or legalistic business. People's needs don't just pop up 9-5 Monday through Friday or when it is convenient for us. Jesus models service that is willing to jump in when needed and balance our rules based on the context of the issue. In times like these, it reminds me of how quickly the COVID safety restrictions shift when something as big and important like someone dying is on the line. As they should! When someone is told they are in final days, they are allowed visitors in senior living facilities or hospitals. When my grandma was given a terminal diagnosis, the whole family got tested and gathered for Thanksgiving. When one of my congregants was put on hospice, I came to visit at her house. Breaking the standard COVID restrictions in these cases does not mean that I no longer follow any of the precautions ever. But in those situations that the need for care becomes great, Jesus shows us in stories like this one about Simon's Mother-in-law, that serving in the ways we can is more important than following rules to a T. Jesus models the importance of going out and doing the work that serves others, prioritizing it over our selfish desires.

Being willing to serve as needed, when needed, can be a bit intimidating. What if we don't know what to do or say? What if we aren't prepared? Jesus's example here gives us assurance. Jesus brings divine healing in ways that we can know we won't be able to replicate, but the way that Jesus serves beyond that, is wonderfully human. In verse 31, the text describes Jesus's healing as "He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up." Jesus's response to the need was to come closer to the person, give a gesture of comfort and affirm attention, and then lift her up. Though in Jesus's case the lifting up was literal and miraculous healing, enough that it uses the same verb as when Jesus resurrects, this one sentence in verse 31 is a model for the basics of care when we, normal people, attend to someone who is hurting.

Jesus models through his simple approach that we don't need to have the perfect words to say or thing to do to make a positive impact on someone hurting. So much of

serving others is coming close to them and the problem, the importance of physical touch or simple gestures of showing attention and comfort, and with that, lifting them up. First, we must come close to those stuck in the problem, which we do literally when possible or we can do so from afar through things like phone or video calls or for bigger issues, educating ourselves on the issue. Second, giving gestures of attention and comfort. This sounds simple, but is an important reminder of the power of holding someone's hand or giving them a hug. These days, when that kind of close contact is not safe, we may not be able to do those things with everyone, or even be physically present with them. This is where things like hand-written notes, phone calls, or small gifts make an okay substitute. Something to back up that you truly care about them or what is going on in their life. I can say from experience, you all are very good at sending notes to show you care. It is such a small but impactful practice! The last part of Jesus's model is what service is all about, lifting them up. We may not be able to resurrect the dead or dying like Jesus, but anytime we serve others we should do so with the goal of lifting them up. Lifting their spirits, lifting them into recovery, being a part of lifting oppression, lifting burdens with them, anything that is meant to bring them up out of whatever their situation is. Perhaps that means something as simple as bringing them a smile through a little note or it could mean something as significant as regularly helping an elderly neighbor. Perhaps, like in the example given by Jesus, all you need to do to be part of lifting them up is just by drawing near and giving comfort. Doing the work of lifting others, serving others, no matter how small a contribution, is all joining in the healing that Jesus brings for all of us. Jesus heals us all so we join in on lifting up others.

The rest of the passage gives us a wider picture of what living out a life of service looks like. Service often means giving generously and freely, not just to one but to many. Jesus does not just keep the healing to Simon's Mother-in-Law, but as others hear about the healing and come seeking the same, Jesus generously continues healing. That said, why is Jesus denying to go back to the town and continue his work there? There are a few things going on there. Part of it being Jesus's claim that his main task is to share the good news, and that healing is but a stepping stone to that message. Another big takeaway through Jesus's decision is modeling setting boundaries for ourselves as caregivers. Like many other places in Jesus's story where he steps away and takes time for himself, Jesus is here caring for himself in stepping away to take the Sabbath time that he missed the day before. We must listen to God and ourselves for when it is time for us to take our Sabbath, taking time for ourselves and to be with God. We also should pay attention to God's guidance for where we are being called to serve and when God is calling us to something new. Jesus also models for us by walking away from the notoriety that we do not serve to gain popularity or fame or lavish in a good reputation. We serve to lift up those that we can and share the good news of Jesus that we have experienced ourselves.

The people of the church serving in big and small ways can have as profound an impact on our community, in ways that are seen and unseen. I know that I am here in front of you all today because of the love and grace, kindness and support that I was shown by my church family growing up. The most profound moments that I have felt the healing movement of the Spirit around me has been through other people. Like many, I had a pretty rough high school experience. I struggled to feel like I was fitting in and

often felt isolated and alone. After a particularly awful day at school, I happened to get to go with my mom to our church for something she was volunteering with, and after that day that left me feeling lowest of the low, one of the church ladies that was there heard how soon I would be graduating and said something like, "Whatever will we do without Kelsey??? It won't be the same without her here." In a day that had me feeling alone and invisible in the world, that offhand comment was as good as lifting Simon's Mother-in-Law up out of her fever. Another time, while I was at camp, we were invited to recognize the tough things we were facing and bring our burdens to God. The ritual brought up those feelings of isolation and hurt and I sat in the middle of the floor and cried. In that moment, one of the other campers who I had not interacted with once the entire week yet, came over, sat beside me and gave me a hug. He said nothing, did nothing else, but just sat and hugged me. Looking back at that moment through the lens of this morning's scripture, I completely understand how Simon's Mother-in-law could be lifted up so far by the simple actions of Jesus coming near and holding her hand. Those are two moments that I look back on as foundational moments in my faith. Those two moments are ones that I knew God was working around me to bring a balm for my soul. It is those two moments and others like it that helped build the foundation of my faith that made me willing and ready to accept the call to serve in ministry just a couple years later. Receiving care and healing from others and God through them, is a big part of my spark to serve God's people however I can.

That's the cool part of being one of God's children. We do not stay on one side of that equation. We both receive healing from God and become healers for God. We are both served by our church family and serve our church family. We can do little things or big things and have a significant impact in others' lives. This is what being a Christian is all about! Accepting Jesus into our hearts and souls to heal us and transform us and then reflecting that love out for all to see and experience in all ways we can. This is the example that Simon's Mother-in-Law sets for us. Not one of a woman who can do nothing but be subservient and is healed just to be relegated back to the Kitchen. But a beautiful example of a woman who is lifted up, healed by Jesus and immediately knows the response to experiencing that is to serve others. Her story is told so early in Mark, it tells us that she was responding with service long before it was made cool by later followers. It is her story that first uses the Greek word *Diakonos* which we translate to mean "to serve," but is where the word Deacon comes from, which is the term we use for clergy that do not feel called to lead a church but to serve the church and the world in some different way. She is arguably the first Deacon of Christianity, which is pretty darn cool!

Let us follow in her footsteps. Follow that path of a woman who recognized the wonderful healing of Jesus, who experienced being lifted up, and had to share it by serving others. Sometimes we are in the place of Simon's Mother-in-law at the beginning of the story, laid low, sick or in need of healing. In those moments let us call out to Jesus and accept Jesus lifting us up. When we are in that lifted place, it is then our turn to share the healing with others. May God guide us toward healing, for ourselves and others.

Let us pray.

Tragedies abound, O Lord. Our newspapers, television newscasts, and media all report the troubled happenings in our world. War and strife seem to be the order of the day. And we are caught up in the midst of this chaos. Calm our spirits, Lord. Help us to focus on the love you have given to us in Jesus Christ. Remind us again that his healing mercies extend to us this day as surely as they did to the people of long ago. We have gathered on this day to hear your word, to be forgiven and healed, to find ways in which we may serve you in peace. Let us accept the love you give to us. Empower us to take that love and use it for good in your world. Let the message of hope and compassion go forth from us again to this world which focuses on tragedy and turmoil. And once again, let us know fully that you are with us. AMEN.