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Mark 1:29-39

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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. 30Now 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.***

It used to be a big deal tradition to go to Sunday Brunch. Restaurants had Sunday Brunch Specials. If you were a church goer, you went to Sunday brunch after church, so maybe noon or so. Because somewhere in the Bible evidently it says that all church services will be at 11am. So those of us who buck the tradition and attend a church service at 10am, we get to go to Sunday brunch earlier.

For the non-church goer, Sunday Brunch timing was complicated by the twin desires to sleep in, and to get to Sunday Brunch before all the church goers!

Jesus going right from the synagogue on the Sabbath to Simon’s house, might have been the first version of Sunday Brunch. There would have been differences of course – a Jewish Sabbath is usually on a Friday/Saturday sundown-to-sundown. And Sunday Brunch has been either replaced by or supplemented with a coffee hour at most churches.

What remains the same, is the sense of fellowship within the congregation both inside the worship space and outside the worship space. Jesus brought Church outside of the building, brought worship into the rest of one’s life space. That is one appropriate view of the combining of the two texts from last week and today.

In addition, the combination of last week’s text in the synagogue casting out the demon, and this week’s text in Simon’s home healing Simon’s mother-in-law shows us the larger goal of Jesus’ ministry purpose.

Epiphany is a season in the church that often gets left out, or is relegated to one day. When Epiphany is a season, we get a chance to see a period of Jesus’ life that we don’t always get to see. We get to watch Jesus’ purpose become manifest.

First, when the three Kings come to see Jesus, we see his *humanity* become manifest to others. Then at Jesus’ baptism, we see Jesus’ *divinity* become manifest. Then, Jesus survives his time in the wilderness, calls his disciples, and goes into the synagogue. Today, as we’ve said, our text follows Jesus out of the synagogue, still on the Sabbath, as he shares fellowship and hospitality with four of his disciples and Simon’s family. Jesus’ *purpose* becomes manifest by combining the lectionary readings for these last two weeks of the season of Epiphany. First by preaching the message with authority and casting out demons, and second by healing Simon’s mother-in-law, Jesus’ purpose of preaching and healing come together.

It's important to note that while some may have associated any illness with demon possession, that is not the case with Jesus. When Jesus goes to Simon’s mother-in-law **“*31He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.”*** This was a private, gentle, compassionate healing in contrast to the public and confrontational events in the synagogue. Jesus’ ministry is both. Jesus didn’t take away this woman’s fever by casting out a demon – her fever left her, not a demon. The verb used for healing has to do with being made whole, and is related to the very used for “salvation.” Being saved refers to being made whole, being re-connected, being re-freshed, being free from the thing that prevents one from having a life of purpose and dignity.

We may put our current social expectations on this text and wish that Simon’s mother-in-law was healed from her fever, and then was able to choose a different role than that of serving the others. One commentator asks, “Why didn’t Simon tell his mother-in-law to take it easy while he made sandwiches this time?” The word translated “serve” usually has to do with food service, probably also something like “waiting on.” It’s a current society’s problem, not an ancient Greek text’s problem, that service, waiting on, have negative “lower than” connotations. But what if her service was out of gratefulness? What if she was serving God by doing so? After all, Jesus uses the same word to describe himself as a humble servant, later in Mark 10. We don’t know enough to be able to say what gave her life meaning. Having been freed to return to her role in her household to honor a guest, and thereby returning to her, her own honor and dignity. I would add that she was freed into her own community. Her healing brought her back to the people, the work, and the world that remained out of reach while she had a fever. She was restored into community, into purpose, into her calling. There is a powerful freedom in this text too, just as there was last week upon being freed from a demon.

After sundown, the Sabbath now over, many were brought to Jesus at Simon’s house, to be released from their demons or healed from their illnesses. So many. I imagine Jesus was exhausted. Trying to be on his own, Jesus got up very early in the morning while it was still dark, and went away to a deserted place. Jesus the introvert. And he prayed.

This to me, is the final part of the full description of Jesus’ purpose. Jesus preached, and Jesus healed, and he prayed in a quiet place. Even Jesus, divinity and all, still prayed to be close to God, prayed to feel connected to God, prayed to be refreshed himself. The pattern of Jesus’ ministry is this: preach, heal, rest, pray. Preach, heal, rest, pray. ***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.”***

I can’t help but wonder about when happened then in all the neighboring towns. What did other people who were healed from their illnesses do? Did they go and serve out of their gratefulness and wonder and awe about what had happened to them? Did Jesus go gently to them, take them by the hand, and lift them up? Once Jesus did what he did, what was the response?

Our question today is, what has Jesus done for you, and what was your response?

I believe that one can’t believe in Jesus as a cognitive exercise, or because someone explained the gospel in just the right words, or because we became convinced by a religious formula. I think one has an experience of Christ. That then leads to questions, mysteries and all manner of things that help us to spend the rest of our lives developing our faith. When Christ has had an impact on our lives, we just can’t unfeel that. You know, when you picture something silly or embarrassing in your mind, you just can’t unsee that. When you know something, you can’t just unknow it without more information.

We can’t unfeel Christ. We can’t undo the impact. I hope then we can’t ignore the results and next steps after that impact. I’m going to embarrass Richard a little here – just as Richard reminds us of his first feeling of Christ in his life when he was 11 and answered an altar call – we can’t unfeel that moment. Even if we’ve never had a powerful moment, faith doesn’t happen only once. Faith is something that grows because we pay attention and take action. We ask the next question; we go to the next event; we go to church the next Sunday too; we follow the feelings. Maybe like the disciples hunted Jesus, we too “meet” Jesus and can’t stop hunting him down – whatever that feeling was, we want it again; we feel responsible for answering some mysterious call that fills us eventually. We don’t follow Christ necessarily because we know what’s coming. Sometimes we follow Christ because we can’t *not* follow. Trusting the unknown because we are freed from our cynical fever or self-protective worrysome fever.

What will Christ free you from today?

Let’s pray…

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-after-epiphany-2/commentary-on-mark-129-39> 2012

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