

## ***To Be Healed***

February 4, 2024

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Isaiah 40:21-31; Mark 1:29-39

*Please Join me in Prayer, Gracious God May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and redeemer. Amen*

This morning our Gospel reading is from the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark and in our text today we encounter Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. These verses offer us a glimpse into a day in the life of Jesus, revealing not just the depth of his compassion but the breadth of his mission that he is just beginning to introduce to the world.

At first glance this gospel reading can feel a bit disjointed and appear that the author is presenting the reader with a bunch of random details about Jesus that do not appear to have much cohesiveness. In these 10 verses, Jesus heals Simon Peter's mother in law, a huge crowd (described as the whole city) comes looking for Jesus in the middle of the night hoping to be healed, many of whom are healed or have a demon cast out of them. Then there is an account of Jesus going to the wilderness to pray and, when found, Jesus decides that he and his disciples will travel to other towns to continue his ministry, preaching and casting out demons. **Not only** does this text have a bunch of narrative details but several of the concepts being portrayed (healings and exorcisms specifically) feel unrelatable.

For some of us these details may be even a bit off putting. I can honestly admit that I often skip over texts that focus on exorcisms (I don't know how to think about it). But, before we dig into the verses of our gospel reading, I think it is important to scope out and view today's text in the larger context of the Gospel of Mark and the ancient context in which it was written.

The Gospel of Mark is distinct among the four Gospels in that Mark writes his gospel in a tone that conveys brevity and sense of urgency, which can be seen by the author's recurrent use of the word "immediately."

Mark's narrative is concise and action-oriented, focusing on the actions of Jesus more than his teachings or more than making theological statements about Jesus. Mark's Gospel, believed to be the earliest gospel, provides a stark, fast-paced narrative that presents Jesus as the secret Messiah, which is evident in today's reading, he silences demons and encourages people not to tell of his healings.

This unique perspective in Mark invites readers into an immediate encounter with Jesus's authority and mystery. The gospel of Mark is rapidly presenting the reader over and over again with the story of Jesus and asking "What are you going to do with this good news?" Throughout the gospel, Mark chooses to show us who Jesus is rather than tell who Jesus is. Because of this, we get to see Jesus' actions in the world and get to decide how we want to follow Jesus in light of his actions.

The quickness of Mark's style is highlighted in our text today! We are in Chapter 1, but in the 28 verses preceding our Gospel reading. Jesus has been baptized by John the Baptist; Jesus has spent 40 days and nights in the wilderness, He has called Simon Peter and his brother Andrew to be his disciples, and he has very publicly cast a demon out a man in synagogue, which then caused "Jesus fame to begin to spread through the surrounding region Galilee." That is a lot of storytelling for just 28 verses. That is enough material for about 5 episodes of the TV show *The Chosen* (which is a TV show about the life of Jesus.)

When you see the rapidness of Mark's storytelling our ten verses today seem to be a little less incohesive because this text fits into the overall storytelling of Mark urgently and rapidly showing us Jesus' actions in the world.

Today's reading opens with the word "Immediately". The word *Immediately* is used 41 times in this gospel. So, immediately, Jesus and his disciples leave the synagogue (where Jesus has cast out a demon) and go to the home of Simon Peter's. Upon arriving at Simon Peter's home, they discover that his mother-in-law is bedridden with a fever. In the ancient world, a fever was a serious concern that often led to dire consequences. As typical of our author, Mark does not delve into the specifics of her illness but focuses on Jesus' direct action. Mark tells us that Jesus took her hand and lifted her up and she is healed. The fever is gone, she is back on her feet, and we are told she begins to *serve* them.

As I prepared for this sermon this week, I came across a lot of dialogue about what it means that Jesus healed a woman who after being healed begins serving men. But I think that is a modern reading of this story that does not allow for the context to highlight Jesus' action. This woman's illness would have had a heavy social cost: as one scholar notes:

*It was her calling and her honor to show hospitality to guests in her home. Cut off from that role by an illness cut her off from doing that which integrated her into her world. Who was she when no longer able to engage in her calling? Jesus restored her to her social world and brought her back to a life of value by freeing her from that fever. It is very important to see that healing is about restoration to community and restoration of a calling, as well as restoration to life. For life without community and calling is bleak indeed.* (<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-after-epiphany-2/commentary-on-mark-129-39>)

Mark tells his reader that word about Jesus healing Simon Peter's mother in law spreads through the town quickly. The community is abuzz with this information and Mark tells us "The Whole City was gathered around the door"—everyone in the city is longing to be healed.

As I mentioned earlier, this text is not only rapid in its story telling, but it also deals with concepts that are not exactly comfortable to our modern sensibilities. I personally find it difficult to see healing and demon possession linked in Mark's story telling. When I read that Jesus healed someone with a fever, I understood intuitively what is happening. But when I read that Jesus is offering healing and exorcisms to the crowd, I'm uncomfortable. I personally do not believe that any illness of any kind is a form of demon possession.

In thinking about this passage this week, it has been helpful to consider the larger context of the Ancient world. At this time in history physical health and spiritual health were much more

interconnected than in our modern mindsets. In the ancient world, It was common to pray to all sorts of God's for physical healing or wellbeing and when sick to turn to magic or spiritual resources for healing. Medicines were often considered to have magical properties- because there was no scientific understanding of why certain remedies may work to heal someone. In the Roman world it was common to pray curses upon other people and it was common to wear amulets to ward off evil spirits with the purpose of not getting sick. So, the fact that the Gospel of Mark would link the idea of demon possession and illness in my mind makes more sense when we consider the context it was written. What I think we can conclude from today's reading is that Jesus has the ability to heal and does so, Jesus offers healing to all sorts of people, bringing them physical and spiritual wellbeing that they did not have before encountering Jesus.

Another interesting thing Jesus keeps doing in these texts is that while he is healing many people, Mark tells us that Jesus will not let the demons speak because they know who he is. Again, this detail feels confusing to me. But this secret keeping is intentional by our author Mark. Jesus is showing us who he is through his actions in the world, not by telling us who he is. Again, in the ancient world and in Roman history healing narratives are common. In fact, several Roman emperors were attributed with healing powers and their ability to heal was used to prove their authority in the world. In this narrative Jesus does the opposite; Jesus is healing the multitudes around him but asking them not to share the story which I think Jesus is saying "you don't need to tell people about this for them to believe, rather people can experience me for themselves and experience the healing I can bring to them."

What does it mean to be healed? To be healed by Jesus transcends the idea that healing is immediate relief from physical ailments, rather to be healed by Jesus is a deeper, spiritual restoration. It's important to recognize that healing does not always equate to being freed from all pain or restored to perpetual health and wellness. Instead, it invites us into a transformative process where the presence of afflictions can coexist with a profound sense of peace and spiritual wholeness that can only come from Jesus.

To be healed by Jesus is to be welcomed into a deeper relationship with Jesus, where our spirits are renewed even when our bodies continue to bear the marks of our earthly struggles. In light of our text today to be healed by Jesus transcends the mere physical restoration of health; rather it is a holistic transformation that touches every aspect of one's being—body, mind, and spirit. To be healed by Jesus is to be restored to full participation in one's community and into service to others.

This week as I have been preparing for this sermon I listened to a podcast that discusses the weekly lectionary texts and in the episode I was listening one of the speakers made a suggestion that just made my imagination leap. He noted that In the Gospel of Mark we are given two detailed accounts of healing, a man has a demon cast out of him in the synagogue and then Simon Peter's mother-in-law is healed. Then we are given the broad story of a huge crowd gathering at the door, and Jesus heals them. But the speaker I was listening to pointed out that it is not likely that Jesus walked out into the crowd and just waived his hand, Saying you are healed! Rather the two stories Mark gives us about healings are meant to set us up to imagine all the diverse ways that Jesus healed all these individuals. Which I think is a wonderful spiritual exercise to use our imaginations to witness Jesus individually healing each person in the crowd, which also explains why he would need to retreat and be

alone for a while after. This comment also led me to engage my own imagination about how I might interact with Jesus if I had been in that crowd.

And so, I ask you to join me in engaging your own imagination. I'm going to close this sermon with a very brief guided meditation. With the hope that we can take Mark's cue of encountering Jesus' action in the world....

Take a deep breath. Feel free to close your eyes if you feel like it.

Visualize yourself moving towards a simple house, you know Jesus is inside.

You are in the midst of a large crowd, you are longing to encounter Jesus, and worried that the crowd is too big.... you see him walk out of the house and begin moving through the crowd.... Jesus turns and notices you....

Jesus turns to you with a welcoming gaze, inviting you to come closer.

Take a moment and Share with Jesus the pain you feel, or the burdens you carry. Speak to Jesus of any of your physical ailments, or your emotional scars, or the spiritual burdens you've been carrying. Feel free to pour out your heart, knowing that Jesus listens with infinite love and understanding.

Jesus heals you- what is like? How do you know that you are healed?

You are restored, not just in body, but in mind and spirit. Are you refreshed and renewed, and ready to live out the healing you've received?  
Please Join me in prayer:

*Loving God, we are grateful for your boundless compassion and Your healing — not only from physical ailments but also from the wounds hidden deep within our souls. Grant us the courage to rise from our places of pain and serve others with the love and strength that we receive from You. May Your Spirit guide us to quiet places of prayer where we can draw closer to You and be renewed for the journey ahead. As we trust in Your everlasting love and mercy. Amen.*