

Pastor Jon's February 7, 2021 Sermon

“The Healing Power of Touch”

Text: Mark 1:29-39 “Healing of Peter's Mother-in-law”

Today we see in our Gospel see the fully human and fully divine characteristics of Jesus come together. We have another healing story in Mark, this time of Simon Peter's mother-in-law. And we see Jesus' need for a Snickers... sometimes you just gotta get away.

After going to the synagogue, where Jesus healed a man with a demon and taught with authority, Jesus went with his friends and disciples Simon Peter, his brother Andrew, James and John to Simon's house in Capernaum. Capernaum was a fishing village on the north shore of the sea of Galilee. I am imagining them relaxing and having a nice little fish fry.

A Bible Fun Fact, Simon Peter was obviously married because he had a mother-in-law. This adds a new layer of wonderment for me as to what Simon left behind to follow Jesus. Simon left everything behind to follow Jesus. Once they entered the house they told Jesus about Simon's mother-in-law. Jesus went in to be with her, he took her by the hand, lifted her up, and the fever left her. No words were spoken by Jesus. No mention of faith on her end. Just the action of Jesus touching her and lifting her. She then got up and began to serve the boys... the ministry of hospitality.

Years ago an Author named Gary Chapman wrote a book about the 5 love languages. The 5 love languages are gifts, words of affirmation, physical touch, acts of service, and quality time. Usually one or two of these rise to the top as your love languages. But Chapman cautions your love languages might not be your spouse or family member's love languages. I know each of our kids have a different dominant love language.

I feel we all are missing physical touch right now with extended family and friends with the pandemic. Some Grandparents are missing their grandchildren. Speaking of physical touch, the other day I was patting Marcella, our four-year old, on the head. She said, “Why are you petting me like a dog?” I said, “It is because I love

you.” The next morning I patted her on the head when she got up and she turned and said, “Oh Dad, I love you too.” But this morning she reprimanded me and said, I’m not a dog - I’m Marcella.

The healing of Simon Peter’s mother-in-law also reminds me of when I was in high school and my friends would come over to our house. My mom would drop everything and start delivering food to wherever we were in the house or outside. Cheese and cracker trays, fruit plates, chips, candy, etc. My friends loved coming over because my mom doted on them.

Simon Peter’s mother-in-law’s response to her healing was to get up and serve. This word serve in the original Greek is “diaconia.” It is where we get the word deacon or deaconess or diaconal minister. Or now on the lay roster of the ELCA we call them ministers of Word and Service.

If you think about it, when you come through something in your life, you are thankful and want to respond by giving back. Much of what we do as Christians is a response to the Gospel. A response to God’s grace, healing, and forgiveness. We are to be a thankful people.

Jesus’s popularity was spreading throughout Galilee and people came from all over bringing their sick and those possessed with demons to Jesus. The whole town gathered around Simon Peter’s door with their sick. Jesus cured many and cast out many demons that night. I am thankful Mark said many. Because I know our prayers for healing don’t always get answered. But because of the cross, I do know God is not afraid to enter into our pain and journey with us.

If a whole town gathered around your door, begging and pleading for healing, how long would you last? Like on Halloween when you are out of candy, you turn out the light, right? Here Jesus isn’t afraid to enter into presence of sickness or stand in the midst of our darkest demons... physical illness, mental illness, addiction, anger, etc. Jesus cares about our well-being.

After a long night of healing, Jesus departed to a deserted place early in the morning to pray. Jesus needed get away for rest from all the

healing. Mark says, Simon and his companions hunted for Jesus. They didn't know where he went.

Jesus' response was not to go back to Capernaum, but to go on to the neighboring towns. Jesus went where people gathered for worship in the local synagogues. Jesus meets us today in worship. Jesus comes to meet us in word and sacrament. To give us a healing word. To physically touch us with the sacrament. To lift those up who are bowed down or struggling with their own demons. In church we gather as broken people, we confess our sins, we look to the cross, hear words of grace, and go out to love and serve the Lord.

Our texts also remind us of our need to pray. When we are exhausted or weighed down by the world or things like grief or worry, we can pray. Jesus, who was fully human and fully divine, prayed often... before big decisions or when he was exhausted.

Lately my prayer time has been on the ice... ice fishing. It is so quiet and peaceful on the ice. It is healing and affirming to me when that pole bends down, you pick it up, and feel the physical tug of jumbo perch or giant crappies... or a Northern running with your hook and minnow.

I have found community on the ice. Several people have come up to talk to me. One elder statesman came up and told me a joke. He said, "What do you call a person who likes to pass gas in private?" I don't know. "A private tooter."

The other day I saw a person signing to two others. It was beautiful to see them signing while fishing. I caught some crappies that day and the hearing person asked what I was fishing with and how deep. I shared my secrets, gave them my minnows, the holes I was fishing, and the three fish I caught. It felt good to help.

I came home and Jeranna asked, "How was your fishing ministry today?" Yeah, that's it. A fishing ministry.

Jesus said he came that all may have life and have it abundantly. Through the word, sacrament, physical touch, fellowship, and through the medical community, God is working to bring healing to our world.

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