

The Power of Touch

Mark 1:29-39 “The Healing of Peter’s Mother-in-law”

I attempted to groom our dog, Badger, on Friday night. He is a golden doodle who needs regular hair care. I usually get half-way done and have to quit... half of his face is done... because he’s had enough. Jeranna nicely asked me when Badger entered the house, “When are you going to finish?”

I know Badger is done when turns his head away, not making eye contact, and looking for an escape route off the picnic table. But if I pet him, tell him he is a good boy, and give him treats, I can buy a little more time. I know why people pay professionals to groom their pets. It’s expensive.

But when Badger is done at my dog spa, he gets the zoomies. He either is so happy to be trimmed, or he is so thankful to escape. He shakes his whole body of loose hair. I notice his color changes from dirty brown to Café Latte. He’s so soft when I pet him. He tilts his head back and stares in my eyes with his big brown eyes... graciously forgiving me for submitting him to that process.

I need to keep Badger soft and cuddly because he has a job Monday-Friday. I walk him to the bus stop on Doty Island most mornings. The kids at the bus stop know Badger by name and come up to pet him. I see their smiles and the joy Badger brings when he sits for them and shakes their hands. Badger used to jump up, but now he sits patiently waiting for his daily pets. It is a beautiful sight to see how calming this is for kids... and Badger too.

There is something about physical touch that is healing whether it be with a pet or another human. There is something healing about holding someone’s hand. According to Gary Chapman in the Book the 5 Love Languages, Physical touch is one of the love languages along with acts of service, gifts, words of affirmation, and quality time.

In our Gospel from Mark 1, Jesus moves from a public healing in the synagogue to a private home. He enters the home of brothers Simon Peter and Andrew in Capernaum. Jesus is told Peter’s Mother in law

is sick in bed with a fever right when he enters the house. Jesus barely even has time to say hello and went in to see her at once. Interestingly, he shared no words. He just grabbed her by the hand and lifted her up. Mark tells us the fever left her and she began to serve them. Jesus touch is healing.

At a minimum, this vignette tells me that Jesus cares about what happens in our private homes... no matter how big or small. Being sick kept Peter's Mother in Law from her preferred role of offering hospitality to others. The Greek word here for serving is *Dioconia*. It literally means waiting on tables. In the church, it's where we get the word Deacon, or Deaconess or Diaconal Minister. Ministers of Word and Service. Peter's mother-in-law responded to her healing by serving others. Coming to church is like this too. We come as broken people confessing our sins and in need of forgiveness and healing. We are then lifted by the good news of Jesus and the sacraments. We too are sent out to go in peace and serve the Lord.

Not only was Peter's mother-in-law healed, but at sundown the whole city was gathered around the door bringing all who were sick or possessed with demons. I don't know about you, but I get anxious enough one 1 person knocks on our door.

Mark says Jesus cured **many** who were sick and cast out **many** demons. Perhaps Jesus couldn't get to everyone. Or everyone could not be healed physically. This is more our reality. Not everyone we pray for is healed in the way we want. We still live in a fallen world filled with sin, disease, war, and unjust suffering. Those things won't go away until Jesus returns.

But the truth in this text is that Jesus enters our places of sickness and isn't afraid to confront our darkest demons. He isn't afraid to get his hands dirty and risk becoming unclean when it comes to loving the neighbor. On the cross, Jesus knew what it's like to suffer and die... he relates to everything we could ever go through as humans.

Jesus is not absent in our times of sickness and death but in the midst of them. Jesus meets us today and touches us physically in gift of holy communion or in the physical touch of another person. For Brynnley, God touched her with a life filled with grace in simple

water and the word. She was marked with the cross of Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit forever. She is called into a life of service to Christ. Our service could be as simple as walking to a bus stop and letting kids pet your dog.

Amen

Optional if there is time.

Finally, our text also deals with prayer. Jesus is in the midst of the crushing demands on his time and the busyness of meeting people's needs, he often departed to a deserted place to pray. His prayer life allowed him to do the physical and emotional work of ministry. Jesus often prayed before big transitions in his life or when he faced things like his upcoming death. Jesus' prayer to his Father showed faith in the midst of uncertainty like in the Garden of Gethsemane before his arrest when he prayed, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want."