



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY, FEBRUARY 4, 2018

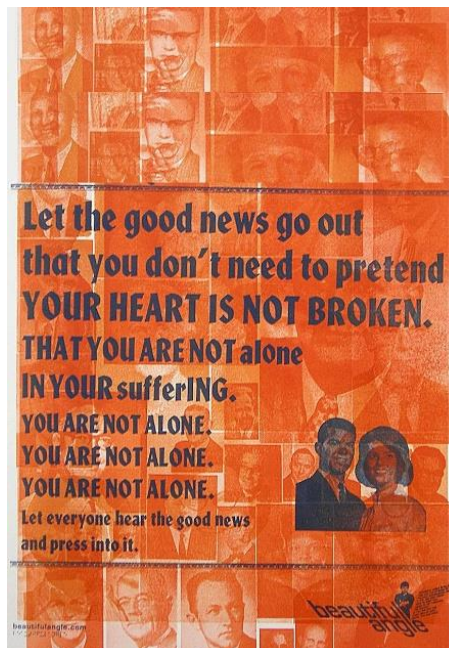
ISAIAH 40:21-31; PSALM 147: 1-12, 21C; 1 CORINTHIANS 9:16-23; MARK 1:29-39

HOW WE HEAL

Mark 1:29-39 *[After Jesus and his disciples left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.*

That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. 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. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." 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." And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.]

I had been asked to tell the story of how I'd gotten a scar. It was one of those icebreakers to begin a group conversation. It's funny when I think about it now – people getting to know each other by sharing stories of how they'd been hurt. Of course, we were only talking about superficial scars. And of course, scar stories are not about wounds. They are stories about healing.



Healing...the great mystery that has captivated humans throughout recorded time, provoking all sorts of imaginative ideas about how it happens...or why it doesn't happen. Every culture has healers, be they strange, magical wonder-workers or highly-educated professionals with practiced, data-driven skills. And, every one of us has scars to prove we have healed from something.

To be human is to know something personal about healing – and to be marked by it.

So, it should come as no surprise to us that Jesus addressed healing as he proclaimed the message about Kingdom of God. Today we hear from the gospel of Mark that Jesus is preaching the good news that God’s liberating presence is NOW, and he’s healing people as he goes along.

That’s good news, right? And yet, it unsettles me.

Here’s why: I have worked in hospitals for years, and I’m startled that Jesus makes healing look so speedy. What I know about healing is better described by author Cheryl Strayed, who writes “*There is so much work to do that has to do with forgiveness and anger, with acceptance and letting go, with sorrow and even perhaps a complicated joy. Those things do not move in a direct trajectory. They will punch you in the face and make you cry and laugh.*”¹

So, what are we to do with this Jesus who touches people, and frees them immediately from their ills like a game of freeze tag? Cast him out?

I don’t think so. Dig in with me.

The gospel of Mark the most direct, no-nonsense account of Jesus’s life among the

four gospels. It portrays Jesus as a man in a hurry. And in this passage, he is liberating all people from whatever possesses them and leading them in a new way of living: the Kingdom of God. For some of those people, the effects appear to be unbelievably immediate. But for others, liberation seems to take a long time, and a winding path.

Consider Simon for a moment, mentioned briefly here because his mother-in-law is sick. As a reminder, Simon Peter, later simply to be called Peter, is one of Jesus’s disciples. We heard the story of Jesus calling him from his fishing career a few weeks ago.

Peter is famous for having an impulsive streak. It trips him up frequently. On one occasion, his impulsivity leads Jesus to rebuke Peter as though he is the devil incarnate. On another he leaps out of the boat to follow Jesus on water-and sinks like a stone.

Christians everywhere love to make fun of Peter and his many mishaps.

And yet, Simon Peter will eventually proclaim Jesus’s message of liberation, and he, too, will free people from whatever possesses them, much the way Jesus is doing here. But in this part of the story, Peter is caught in his own, slow, healing process, and his mother-in-law is the identified sick person.

¹Strayed, Cheryl. *Tiny Beautiful Things*. Vintage Books: New York, 2012 pp 304-311

So, Jesus takes her hand, lifts her up, and she is freed to serve others.

My suggestion to you is to ignore the notion that a woman's purpose is to serve a bunch of men, and simply pay attention to the pattern that's playing out here – the pattern of Jesus freeing people to live within the kingdom of God, and serve others.

That's the pattern we will see repeat over the next few verses in various ways. It's the pattern we will see in Peter, too: he's freed from what holds him back to live wholly within the kingdom of God and share the good news about what that's like.

So here we are, thousands of years later. Do we know what it's like to live wholly within the kingdom of God? I do believe that the kingdom of God brings liberation and healing for all. I do. But I must admit that historically, the spread of Christianity has not been liberating. Frequently, well-meaning bearers of Jesus message about the kingdom of God have spread other messages, like imperialism. White Supremacy. Ableism. The subjugation of women. Fear of the body. I could go on and on. You probably could, too.

So, I want to be clear that these are wounding, possessive messages and they have **no place** in Jesus's message of liberation.

But many of us are still untangling our stories from these messages. Many of us don't have scar stories to tell about how we have healed from these toxic messages, because our wounds are still open, and that can be really discouraging.

In the book *Meal from Below*, Kris Rocke writes: "Liberation runs in two directions at once – it loses the chains of injustice, but it also provokes the hidden mechanisms that inflict injustice. Good News awakens the angels as well as the demons."²

I think those are wise words for us to keep in mind as we reckon with the enslaving messages that have spread through our churches. Because liberation in the kingdom of God within our midst is *profoundly provoking*. It will draw a crowd.

What does it provoke in you? Angels? Demons? Unhealed Wounds? Scar stories that need to be told?

Whatever it provokes, hear the good news: God is here. You are not alone in it. There's more here than what is immediately apparent.

Now, I know Saint Mark's to be a community that longs for liberation for the most vulnerable in our city, like Jesus. Our very origin is rooted in a desire to be a house of

²Rocke, Kris & Dewey, Scott. *Meal from Below*. Street Psalms Press, 2012

prayer for ALL people, liberated from sociological divisions, and that is good. But I wonder, if we ourselves were to reveal our wounds, how might we be dispossessed of what binds us? What scar stories might we tell? How might we be liberated to serve others in new ways?

The message that Jesus proclaimed is for all people: vulnerable people, able-bodied people, ill people, status-quo people, impulsive people, ordained people....ALL PEOPLE. There are no qualifications to restrict us in God's liberating love.

This is the miracle. This is the truth that heals in personal and collective ways. It's slow, and winding. It involves *forgiveness and anger, acceptance and letting go, sorrow and even a complicated joy.*

To heal in that winding trajectory and to bear the scars is to bear witness to the kingdom of God here and now.

May we be liberated to serve others, in Jesus name.



Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!