



February 4, 2018 - Healing and Wholeness for All Given by Rev. Mattei

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God"? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. (Isaiah 40:27-29)

"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." (Mark 1:38)

From the very beginning of Mark's Gospel we hear that it is about the message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:1) announced by a messenger (John the Baptist in Mark 1:2), by Jesus himself (Mark 1:14-15) and finally by the disciples turned apostles (Mark 16:15-18). The content of the message is Jesus Christ, who he is, what he does, what he represents, Whom he represents. Jesus is the message: knowledge of Jesus, life in Jesus, faith, hope and love in Jesus, through Jesus, with Jesus. The key words spoken by Jesus announce the Kingdom of God come near; but there is no way we can receive that, perceive that, believe the Message unless we turn around (Mark 1:15).

Immediately following that announcement Jesus calls disciples to follow him, to watch and learn from him, to be transformed and baptized in the power of the Spirit (Mark 1:8) and then to be sent. What they witness is a teaching with authority and an exorcism on the sabbath in the synagogue at Capernaum. A demon is expelled from a person but not before Jesus rebukes the evil spirit. Even though the demon knows who Jesus is, he ought to keep silent: acknowledgment and public declaration by demons is but bad and incoherent publicity. Orthodoxy without ethics is knowledge without wisdom. Abusive, exploitative and corrupt spirits display a behavior that has nothing to do with the kingdom of God: racism, sexism, bullism, greed, violence, arrogance and contempt for life in general are demons to be exorcised. They do not align with the plans of God. They are counter to life but pretend to serve or satisfy life while based on fear. How much more nuclear power do we need before we say: "Enough"? How distorted and depleted should our soul become before we take offense at sexual slavery? How insensitive and deaf should we allow our ears to get before we hear the cry of those used as pawns in political games? God does not want our death. That's why Jesus is appalled at the presence of enslaving demons. Our society's spirit needs to be healed.

But Jesus' attention is not only turned towards spiritual needs. He cares for physical needs as well. His sensitivity is responsive to the whole person. Peter's mother-in-law is ill. Jesus, taking her by hand, namely breaking boundaries by touching her (a woman and a sick person on a sabbath day), raises her up and she begins to serve: she is the first resurrection story in the gospel of Mark.¹ God is doing something new with Jesus: those who receive him will not faint or grow weary.²

The story continues with Jesus healing many more sick people and casting out many devils not allowing them to speak. Knowledge of who Jesus is is not enough; Matthew's Jesus warns that not those who cry "Lord, Lord!" will enter the kingdom of heaven but those who do the will of the Father.³ But this intense ministry cannot be done without constant and prolonged connection with the Spirit of God in prayer. Prayer is the spiritual ground where we are fed and renewed in Spirit for ministry. And Jesus is clear about his mission: his message of healing and reconciliation is for all.

How has Jesus' mission touched us? Have we been healed of spiritual disconnect with God? Have controlling demons been cast out of us? Are we still subject to pride, jealousy, greed, hate, prejudice, discrimination? Are demons still distorting our thinking and abusing our mind and our body? Is this the time when we need to invite Jesus the Healer into our life? Is it time to pray for wholeness and holiness in our life? Mark tells us that many were healed. He doesn't say "all." Sometimes physical healing is not achieved but wholeness and healing may happen all the same as we are given the opportunity to be connected more intimately with God, to receive God in our pain.

How are we already part of Jesus' mission to the world? Are we denouncing the demons that convulse and trash people or are we tolerating or even ignoring them? Not only demeaning language, abuse of power, hate and greed are commanded out of us, but also a compassionate and advocating stance in favor of those who suffer is required of a disciple of Jesus.

A healed disciple, one who has been made whole and reconciled with God, can be a powerful presence in the world. Indeed, clear and faithful witnessing is our mission. Opportunities abound. Our Evangelism Team will call on us to staff booths at various local events where we can witness and share the good message. When the call arrives, will you rise and serve?

¹ According to NT prof. Cynthia Briggs Kittredge of the Seminary of the Southwest, Austin, TX, *"Readers of Mark are not told of Jesus' appearances after his resurrection (in the original version of the gospel of Mark that ends at Mark 6:8). Rather, they are sent back to Galilee where they will remember Jesus' ministry of resurrection. The verb to "raise up" is used in healing stories in Mark 1:31, 2:9, 2:11, 3:3, 5:41, 9:27. The healing of Peter's mother in law is the first resurrection story in the gospel. Serving epitomizes Jesus' own ministry: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45). She is an icon of resurrection and a paradigm of Christian ministry."*

² Isaiah 40:28

³ Matthew 7:21