



Proclaiming the Message
1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (February 4, 2024)

The verses preceding today's gospel reading, Mark reports the story of how Jesus has astounded everyone at the synagogue in Capernaum. Not only does Jesus teach with authority unlike any they had heard before, but this authority has been further demonstrated by his freeing a man from an unclean spirit. Now leaving the synagogue, Jesus joins his four disciples in the home of Simon and Andrew, where he is told that Simon's mother-in-law is sick.

Jesus goes to her and takes her by the hand and lifts her up. This very intimate gesture is not healing from a distance, but a connection with his loving touch.

Of course, it isn't just Simon's mother-in-law who is healed. That evening, just as the Sabbath is ending, virtually the whole town turns up at the door. They bring to Jesus all who are sick and oppressed by evil spirits. And, as in the synagogue, Jesus continues to express his authority. He overcomes the forces of sickness and evil. In their place, Jesus gives wholeness and healing. One can only imagine the excitement this causes, and it soon becomes clear that the people of Capernaum would very much like for Jesus to be their "hometown healer."

So, when Jesus slips away in the early morning darkness to pray, it isn't just his companions who hunt for him; everyone is out looking.

However, Jesus is clear about his mission and cannot be centered on just one town. He has come to proclaim the good news of God's gracious reign to all the world, and to make this good news both real and personal. His "message" goes beyond simple physical healing better spoken of as curing.

His message is about intimacy with God. And so, our reading ends with Jesus leaving Capernaum to spread that desire throughout the whole region. This he does through preach, heal, and cast out demons.

So, how might we connect these stories with our own lives? Certainly, we hear a lot about Jesus healing people and delivering them from the power of evil. Jesus, however, was not simply a “wonder worker.” The healings and exorcisms are a part of his larger message. Along with his teaching and preaching they proclaim the truth of God’s love and power.

Not only does Jesus continue to bring healing and wholeness into our lives today, but, as those who live on this side of his resurrection, we are reminded that, despite the fear and despair we can so often experience, our world has already been claimed by God’s loving authority in Jesus.

If we let ourselves, in all humility and vulnerability, be touched and lifted up, serving him will be a privilege and honor. It will produce joy.

We also see the importance of prayer and the power of human connection and touch. Prayer was a priority for Jesus. Prayer was a refuge and a charging station. He needed time away to focus and reconnect with Self. Behind all his public activity, his preaching, teaching, and miracles, lay Jesus’ total dependence on God. And so, even in all the busyness, Jesus makes the time to center his life in prayer.

Prayer remains one of the most important ways to connect our lives to the living presence of God who, through the power of the Spirit, has promised to guide and encourage us.

Prayer is also how we can “lift up” one another, especially in times of stress, sickness, or need. When accompanied by such simple gestures as a hand on the shoulder or a quick hug, our prayers can convey God’s love both powerfully and personally. And we can remind one another that we are not alone. A gesture of acceptance and intimacy warms the heart and restores one’s confidence and resolution.

Let us remain focused on the mission of Jesus to proclaim the kingdom and let us trust Jesus’ loving care towards all. Amen.