Mark 1:29-39

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34And 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.

35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37When they found him, they said to him, ‘Everyone is searching for you.’ 38He 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.’ 39And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Healing That Unites Us

1. You ever had those days that just don’t seem to end? Our younger members maybe have such experience fresh in their minds; the baby wakes them up early, assuming of course that you were even able to sleep at night. Once the baby is stabilized, you rush to work where you have an inbox that’s overflowing, and your under pressure there with this emergency and that, deadlines, quotas, unexpected problems like the computer crashing or difficulties with logging in, forgotten passwords, unscheduled meetings. On your way home you have a flat tire, and it’s raining. You get home and your child is crying because you were late, and after dinner the doorbell rings and your realize that you’ve forgot that tonight was the night the pastor was coming over to visit..You ever had those days?

Jesus seems to have had one of those days in today’s reading. The day starts with him going into a synagogue to teach. While he’s there, he encounters the man with the “unclean spirit” who we discussed last Sunday. He leaves the synagogue to go to Peter’s home, but Peter’s mother-in-law is sick with fever, so Jesus takes her by the hand and lifts her, and the fever leaves her. But now news of the healings has traveled through the whole town, and that evening people bring everyone who is sick or demon-possessed to Jesus, who must have worked late into the evening healing so many of these people.

And the next morning, the people were looking for Jesus, presumably because he hadn’t gotten around to healing *everyone* who was sick or demon-possessed. They probably think that he is hiding somewhere because he needs some personal time. When the disciples find Jesus, who had been out praying, Jesus tells them that they need to go to other towns to preach the message, “for that is what I came to do,” he tells them.

1. Aside from calling disciples, there have been only two elements of Jesus’ ministry; he has been teaching and he has been healing. And it seems, based upon what we read this morning, that the healing took a far greater share of his time and energy. From our modern way of looking at these two elements of Jesus’ ministry, we find the healings far more interesting than the teaching; we imagine that there were a lot of teachers back then, but we think that healers like Jesus were few and far between. But this is not the reality. Ancient texts from different cultures all tell stories about miraculous healings performed by holy men and women. So to an audience that first heard Mark’s Gospel, it wasn’t the healings in themselves that fascinated them but rather *who was being healed.*

I mentioned last week that healing had a social component: the man with the unclean spirit was not simply restored to physical or mental health; he was restored to the community! While before he was an exile now he could fully participate in the life of the village. He could eat with others and attend the synagogue and worship with the whole community. While before he had been lonely and frightened, without hope and without fellowship, now he was happily involved with other people and safely dwelling amongst friends and family. And so there was an emotional aspect to Jesus’ healing in that he brought true joy to the one who was being healed.

This was Jesus’ MO (modus operandi); he was indiscriminate in his healings. And this tendency of Jesus to heal *anyone,* including the demon-possessed, the lepers, women, *mothers-in-law,* foreigners, strangers, Romans, this is what had people buzzing. I can hear some of them saying, “He can’t heal that man; he’s a psycho. He can’t touch that person; he’s got leprosy! And that guy’s got aids! And that guy’s our enemy. And that’s a woman who’s not even related to him!” Mark shows us this progression in chapter one as Jesus moves from healing a *spiritually sick male in public* to healing a *woman who he didn’t even know* *in private* to *healing an “untouchable” leper out in the countryside.* Jesus doesn’t seem to be making any exceptions. It doesn’t matter who needs healing – Jesus just heals them.

1. Which brings us back to his priority; amidst all the healing that’s going on in Capernaum, and there’s more to be done – the people are looking for him, Jesus tells the disciples, “Time to pack up and get back to work doing what I came to do; to proclaim the message to the neighboring towns.” Not to heal their sick, but to proclaim the message. The healing is a side job.

We’re still left a bit in the fog about the exact message that Jesus was spreading;

All we have to go on so far is “Repent and hear the good news; the kingdom of God has come near.” Yet this message is, for Jesus, the priority. Today, as then, our main interest in Jesus is about what he can do for us physically. Feed us, cure us, cleanse us, heal us. Take care of our physical needs. “Lord, take away my addiction.” “Lord, help me overcome my cancer.” “Lord, I’m hungry; please get me something to eat.” And being the loving, compassionate savior that he is, he desires helps us. But have we listened to his message, the message that for him was the priority, the very reason that he came? Do we know what the gospel is that Jesus was trying to teach us? It seems that even Mark was more focused on the healings than he was on Jesus’ teaching.

1. Jesus was sent to us because there was a sickness that every one of us is infected with: sin. That’s such an old-fashioned word, isn’t it? It causes some eyes to roll, some to smirk, some to say, “here we go again; another pastor who’s gonna say that unless I stop sinning I’m going to hell.” We understand sin as some violation of law that is willful and evil, but we experience it in a far more complicated way. It may be experienced as a kind of shame that makes us lie about who we really are. It may be a pride that makes us lash out at someone who recognizes our vulnerability. It may be a fear that makes us build walls around ourselves, physically or psychologically, to keep us from becoming like others who, we are told, are dirty or corrupted or smelly.

It was such fear, such insecurity, that made some people oppose Jesus’ ministry. We ask ourselves, “Why would anyone be upset that Jesus was healing people?” The answer is simply that there are some people who don’t want other people to be fully healed, because that would mean that those people *would* be full participants in the community. I was reading an article by Bishop Desmond Tutu this week, describing how he was raised in Apartheid South Africa, how the children were indoctrinated from a very young age into believing that they were a sub-race. To be a “Native” was a negative thing, as if being of European ancestry made you superior. The whites had even convinced themselves that they *were* superior to the “Natives,” justifying their oppressive policies by arguing that their rule was *good for the Natives.* The irony, of course, is that the whites introduced the Natives to the Bible, and the Bible is what helped men like Bishop Tutu realize that God loves him as much as he loves the white man, and since God loves both equally, there is no reason for us to make distinctions in who we love. If you want to know the essence of the message that Jesus was so bent on teaching, it’s this: God’s kingdom is here, a kingdom where God’s love is abundantly with us and between us. Jesus embodies this, even as his own body is broken for us. This is the message that takes priority over the healing of all the physically and spiritually sick, all the lepers and all those with unclean spirits. The kingdom of love, God’s perfect love for us, and our love for one another, is the ideal.

1. The takeaway: The message that Jesus was so intent on spreading was itself a kind of healing message. To those who could not love other human beings as equal in God’s eyes, the message was offensive and summarily rejected by them. For those who could open their eyes to see their own arrogance, their fear of the unknown, their insecurities, their *sin*, the offer is made: Repent, and believe the news which has now become good – you are loved by God with a love that only God can provide, a love that holds nothing back, including his own son, which is all that you could ever ask for.

Are there people that you don’t want Jesus to heal because you would rather feel yourself more “blessed” by God? Are there people you would wish to exclude from God’s kingdom? Then it’s time to look within yourself to recognize what Christ needs to heal within you. I urge you to do so, and to push yourself to welcome those who you have hitherto been excluding, ignoring, or depreciating. We are all one in Jesus Christ. His loving sacrifice was for all people for all time, and his will is for us to celebrate this wonderful news and this new life together.