

He Took Her Hand And Raised Her Up

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Virginia Beach VA 23452
Epiphany 5
Mark 1:29-39

Have you not heard? Have you not seen? Those words begin the reading from Isaiah. I suspect people in Capernaum might be saying the same thing about today's gospel passage. Have you seen this Jesus? Have you heard him? Has he healed you? These are all questions that were probably running through the small town.

I went to see the movie the Post on Monday. Now we all know that the first 15-20 minutes are all previews of coming attractions. The first chapter of Mark is much like the previews of coming attractions. In short order Jesus is proclaimed as the Christ in verse 1, he is baptized, tempted in the wilderness, then immediately heals a demon and in today's passage heals Simon's mother in law, immediately after leaving the synagogue, then says let's take this show on the road. By the way that's two healings on the Sabbath before the sun goes down. This first chapter sets the stage for what is about to take place in the rest of the Gospel.

The whole city was gathered at the door of Peter's house. Well the whole city would fit on the block where our church sits, but still the idea is that everyone wanted to see him, hear him, maybe even touch him. Jesus attracts not by what he says, but more by what he does. In Mark Jesus is a man of action and attraction. So how does he attract all these followers in a world that lifted up the mighty and powerful and looked down upon the poor?

I believe it is what he does and how he does it. Miracle stories, including healings make up 200 verses in Mark, which are more verses than Mark spends on the Passion narrative! Now that tells us something about how important healings are to this gospel writer and to his community. The healings though are not so much about a display of power as they are about the compassion that he has for those who need healing. Those healed are often among the last and the least.

If I was preparing to tell this gospel I would take some time with the gesture where it says, "He took her hand and raised her up." My preferred translation is raised her up, rather than lifted her up for this passage uses the same verb "to raise" as is used in other healings and to refer to the Resurrection. I say that because the gesture that comes to my mind is one of great gentleness. His touch is gentle and kind.

Touch is a critical piece of healing in Mark. He touches people when he heals them and some like the woman with the hemorrhage touch him in hopes of being healed. We refer to healing prayer and the laying on of hands. I read somewhere that this touch actually makes a difference. It was a study where people prayed "long distance" for people they knew and another group was physically present with the person and laid hands on them.

Those who had the laying on of hands seemed to get a better result in this rather unscientific study, and I believe touch is important. That is why when we do healing prayers we also do the laying on of hands.

There is something powerful in the laying on of hands that I cannot explain, but I have certainly experienced. There was a powerful event back in the mid 90s that taught me of the power of healing touch and started me on my path to being a healer. I was in a small prayer group where people often asked for prayers at the end of our meeting. Some of you may know this story, but for those who don't here it is.

One evening a member of the prayer group came over to me and asked me to pray for her wrist. I knew that this had been bothering her for weeks if not months. I quickly said, "Oh you want Wendy to do that not me." She looked me in the eye and said, "No you are the one." I put her wrist between my two hands and said to God, "OK I've no idea what I am supposed to do. If you want this to happen you need to give me the words and right now." I do not to this day remember what I said. I just remember an intense heat built up between my hands and all of a sudden I heard and felt a pop. I let go, she pulled her hand back, moved it around and said, "Thanks, its all better. I knew you could do it." I was stunned to say the least. By the way, I didn't really believe that anything would happen , but that is another sermon.

Following this I talked the associate rector at my parish and she introduced me to Agnes Sanford and the McNutts all leading teachers in healing and the rest is history.

For me the message for me as the unexpected and very reluctant healer was to serve. This was the start of my call to healing ministry and the first step down a path that has brought me here. The lesson was a whack up the side of the head from God saying, "I have work for you to do so get with it."

The healing of Simon's mother in law is one of four healings of women that all point to the importance of discipleship. Now some will say, Wow is that typical. She gets healed and they expect her to make dinner. Well first of all that tells you she was completely healed and secondly, the word used is the root word for deacon. A deacon is one who serves. The response to the healing is to serve. There is the message.

Lastly today's gospel is not the end, but rather the beginning of the greater story. The disciples now take the Jesus movement on the road, the coming attraction presentation has ended and the main feature is beginning.

Presiding Bishop Curry speaks of the Jesus movement and in our gospel today we really see the start of it all. No longer is this a small group of people located in Capernaum, but the beginning of the spread of the kingdom to all of Galilee and then on to the rest of the world. Ultimately that is our call as Christians for that is what we are called to do as well.

Jesus' healings are all acts of compassion and kindness. Whenever I portray a healing I find myself drawn to portray Jesus in a very gentle and kind way with the person. Now his treatment of demons is another matter, but always to the person needing healing it is kindness and compassion. We are called to go out in the world and show acts of compassion and kindness in what is an absolutely brutal world. That is one important way to carry the Jesus movement out into the world just as Jesus does after this first chapter of Mark.

I was reading a wonderful essay by Br. Curtis Almquist that he titled *Kindness, an intervention for our disquieted world*. He writes that Jesus in his many healing miracles is moved by compassion for the person. Kindness is one of the fruits of the Spirit that Paul lists in Galatians.

Br. Curtis urges us to be kind, to be compassionate now. Don't wait until someone else shows you kindness, but be the one who initiates it. This is something many of us may be out of practice doing. Maybe this is your Lenten discipline. Of course to do this we first must show compassion and be kind to ourselves. We can't show to others what we do not do for ourselves so first of all be kind and gentle to yourself. Just as it is hard to love you neighbor when you do not love yourself it is hard to be kind to others if you are not kind and compassionate to yourself.

Take the time to realize you are an amazing person even in the midst of times when you have really messed up. At the end of the day make sure you remember to look back at the day and see all the times God love for you has shown through. As the hymn we sang before the gospel promises, "There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin sick soul." That is the balm of God's love and grace.

"A brother asked Abba Pimenion, "How should we practice life?" And the old man said, "To live ever in loving kindness and in humbleness, and to do good to one's neighbor." Kindness is of our God-created essence, a necessary intervention for our disquieted world.¹

*What does the Lord require of you but to do justice,
and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8) "*

¹ https://www.ssje.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/MWM_Printable_Kindness.pdf