

“She Began to Serve”

February 7, 2021

Good News for a New Year series – Holy Communion – Livestream

We’ve said all along in this series that Mark is telling us “just the facts” – and fast! Everything Mark shares has a goal – to show us that Jesus is the Messiah, Son of God, the Lord. His Good News shows through in how Jesus moves and acts – not saying too much – but embodying the love of God in how he teaches and heals – and doing it all with authority!

Jesus moves quickly from a public place to a private home – from teaching in the synagogue to visiting one of his new disciples at home where he learns that Simon-Peter’s mother-in-law is sick. He moves from an exorcism to healing. Jesus heals – not because anyone asks him to on her behalf, not because she comes to him believing in him, but because that’s who he is. Jesus is bringing Good News of God’s reign – right now – even to people and places no one expects. Nothing is outside of Jesus’ care. No one is outside of his ministry and mission.

We might read this as just another one of those healing stories. Except it’s not. For Jesus to go to a woman he doesn’t know – and to touch her – to heal her – was the stuff of scandal and totally taboo. Even this small act of healing would’ve made Jesus unclean. It’s completely outside of what is deemed acceptable or appropriate. But nothing will stop Jesus healing – and especially not social convention or expectation.

For some in Jesus’ time, illness was thought to be the product of sin – a consequence of someone’s action or the sin carried over from generations back. But Jesus is concerned with offering wholeness and healing. He is quick to respond when he hears that this woman is ill. He works against forces that would stop God’s intention for wholeness and salvation.

For anyone who was ill in body, mind, or spirit, illness meant isolation, and we know that reality all too well. We’ve heard it – loved ones unable to be together because of a virus, healthcare workers serving with compassion and care, chaplains standing in for loved ones. I’ve heard from more than one person about how much they miss physical touch – a hug from a friend or a grandchild. Perhaps we didn’t realize how important touch is for us.

But touch plays an important part in this healing story. Mark tells it quickly, but includes that detail. This is a part of the mystery of the Incarnation – that Jesus comes in the flesh and interacts in the flesh. God’s love is expressed and felt because we have to trust it. Jesus goes to this woman, takes her hands, and helps her up. (Here’s a secret –

it's a similar word that's used for resurrection.) There are no words – just a touch and healing. The fever breaks, and she begins to serve them.

That word *serve* carries layers of meaning. Some translations say that she waited on them or attended them, which is the same word used for what the angels did for Jesus in the wilderness. They waited on him or attended him. The word is a form of *diakonia* – service or ministry; it's where the word *deacon* comes from.

This woman is the first deacon – the first one to serve others. And let's be clear: she's not doing it to pay Jesus back or to earn this healing or because she's supposed to serve because she's a woman. She serves as a response to the healing she's experienced. She serves as a response to what Jesus has given her.

And that's where we hear the call on our lives. Healing is never the end of the story, but sometimes we struggle to respond. We experience God's healing power and love, and then do nothing. We find a blessing in a moment of God's presence and care. We keep on living, as if it's no big deal. We don't talk about it. Sometimes we don't even stop long enough to thank God the gift of healing.

But this woman reminds me that we have a responsibility – not an obligation – but an opportunity to share Good News. Jesus' healing power equips us to serve him. We receive a blessing, which should bring us closer to him and make us even more attentive to follow him. His healing power calls us to serve in whatever way we can. For this woman, it was to provide for Jesus and others so that he could continue to do his work.

And so it goes on. Between the man released from the unclean spirit in the synagogue and this woman healed in a home, more and more people come to Jesus, and so he heals them. He's gains fame because of his ministry, and even when he goes to rest, his disciples literally hunt him down because people are in need.

I'm always intrigued when Jesus goes off by himself to pray. It says something about his sense of himself—who he was and what he needed. After giving so much of himself to others, he knew he needed to be renewed by God's love. To share God's power, he needed to rest in God's love. To do God's work, we need to rest in God's love. So even in the midst of this healing story, there's a call to Sabbath – to be renewed and reconnected with God.

Jesus had authority from God – something new the people hadn't seen before. He had a following. What he did literally gave people new life. It would've been easy for him to stay and do more good where he was known.

But Jesus' mission was more than gaining popularity, power, or pride. Jesus didn't stay in comfortable places because that wasn't his mission.

He tells the disciples that they must move on to another town because he must proclaim that the Kingdom of God is near. He takes the message to people who haven't heard it or seen it. His message is about God's grace and love for all people in all places. We see in Jesus' ministry that healing isn't limited to a proper place. God isn't limited to what we deem as holy spaces, but God works in daily life places because Jesus is the God Incarnate – God engaged in the world. God can work everywhere!

We are disciples who serve in his name and for his sake. And we keep making disciples even as we're being formed into disciples. Renewed health is this woman's impetus for serving. What a way to respond to God's work in our lives! Out of gratitude for Jesus' love and mercy to us, we serve him.

And service is a broad term. It might mean doing business of the church or serving here. It might mean talking about God's power and love in your life. It might mean serving in our community or responding to a need you become aware of. Over the past couple of weeks, someone in our congregation has led the effort to set up a Little Free Food Pantry outside of Whitlow's where people can give and receive.

I thought of the blessing of service as we interacted with delivery people who brought a new freezer to our home. They were thorough, and their everyday work was a blessing to us. They are people who serve and help in their daily work.

This healing story challenges us to consider how we respond to God's grace in our lives, to the love and care that Jesus offers us and that we receive. How do we serve? How are in ministry? And where do we see that kind of service – where it's organic and simply happens? How does it become a part of our work or our lives?

Here's a challenge for us this week. Reach out to someone you know who is works in an area that serves others: healthcare, education, someone who works at a grocery store or a utility company or in transportation, food service, public service, custodial or cleaning services, or a first responder. We know someone who serves others every day. Take time to call, write a note, send a text of appreciation - tell them you're grateful - and advocate for them when you can.

Just like the encounter with the man in the synagogue, this moment in Jesus' ministry reminds us that God cares deeply about our need for healing and responds to it – not always in the ways we anticipate – but God works to bring healing and wholeness – a sense of God's presence and care. Healing is not always the same as cure – but assures us that we are not alone. God cares about us and seeks to make God's presence known.

Today we will share a meal that Jesus gives for us to receive. It's a simple meal to remind us of love. It reminds us of where our loyalty lies—we look to a new authority for peace and mercy, no matter what messages we hear around us. In the midst of

waiting for “back to normal,” uncertainty about when it will come, unemployment, financial strains, injustice, illness, grief, personal conflicts, confusion and doubt, this meal puts us back together and reminds us of God’s grace.

It reminds us that we’re a part of Kingdom-building work, claiming God’s love for the world, showing God’s grace, bringing healing and help in word and action, all of the ways we serve God and others. I pray we can renew that commitment as we come to the table of the One who invites us – the One who heals and frees us to serve. Friends, we are people with Good News.

Thanks be to God. Amen. Let us pray as we come to the table of grace today...