

Have You Not Heard?

Isaiah 40: 21-31

Mark 1: 29-39

February 5, 2012

United Memorial

Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer, amen.

Did anything jump out and grab you about the story I just read from Mark's gospel?

I think I was a feminist from way back...

Even as a child, I remember being somewhat incensed by this story.

If your mind wandered off while I was reading, let me refresh it.

Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law of a fever, and then, "she got up and served them."

I thought to myself, typical, she got up out of her sick bed so that she could make supper for the men!

Now, this doesn't seem like the Jesus that I have come to know and follow.

The Jesus that broke down barriers of class and race and gender.

The Jesus who did the unexpected, who touched the untouchables, who honored all people.

So I took another look at the passage and did some research.

I found out that in the NRSV Bible, which is considered to be the one that makes use of the most recent scholarship, the Greek word, diaconeo is translated "to serve."

Other Bibles translate it as "to wait on them" or "to attend to their needs."

This is how it has been read throughout the centuries and, and it seems to suggest that Peter's mother-in-law gave them something to eat and drink.

However, by the time Mark's gospel was written, that Greek word diaconeo, had come to mean Christian discipleship.

It is the same root word that we get the word deacon from.

And in the United Church of Canada we have diaconal ministers, ones who are commissioned to service.

This research helped me see this passage in a different light.

I have come to view it as one in which Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law and set her free for service.

For service as a disciple,

She 'heard' the Good News, through being healed, and wanted to share it.

Imagine!

Being healed from whatever keeps us from being our best selves and set free!

Set free to share the good news of Jesus life and ministry.

How do we share the Good News of Jesus? What does that mean in our time and context?

From where do we draw our strength and energy?

The other thing that this passage says to me is that we need time with God to recharge our batteries.

Time to become restored in mind, body and spirit.

We often think that there is something wrong with just being rather than doing.

What I try and keep in mind is that Jesus...

In all the busyness of his days when he began his ministry...

With all the demands that the disciples placed upon him...

With all the people that wanted to touch him.

Jesus over and over took time away.

After Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law, the entire town gathered in front of the house.

Waiting to be healed.

Waiting for him to drive away their demons.

Waiting for a chance to be in his presence.

And he was there for them.

But the next day, the next day, Jesus goes away, out of the town, to a lonely place, to pray.

Jesus recognized that in order for him to continue his ministry, he needed time away to pray.

To be in communion with the God that he knew as Abba.

He needed this time in order to be able to come back to the demands of the disciples and the people; ready to preach, teach, and heal.

If Jesus could take time away from the demands of his world, in order to be in close relationship with God, can we do any less, in order to fulfill our calling to be one of his followers?

Think of that day that Jesus spent. He went to synagogue, to a friend's house for lunch, heals a number of people and then the next day takes some time off to meditate.

And then the story continues with the disciple searching him out in order to come back to the town.

To continue to preach, teach, and heal.

But Jesus tells them that they can't stay in that town that there are other places that he needs to go where people need to hear the good news.

And so he travels over all Galilee preaching and teaching and driving out demons.

Sharing the Good News.

I don't know about the rest of you but it was only about 10 years ago that I realized that Jesus' Holy Scriptures are what we refer to as the Old Testament.

They were his Good News.

They are what he first heard in the synagogue...

What he first learned from and what he based his ministry on.

The Hebrew Scriptures in many places are very poetic.

I wish that I could read Hebrew, because I am sure that they would be even more effective in their original language.

But just listen to some of the words again from Isaiah.

Words that Jesus would have heard many, many times as he was growing up.

Do you not know? Were you not told long ago? Have you not heard how the world began? Is there anyone else like our God? Look up at the sky! Who created the stars you see?

The one who leads them out like an army, our Lord knows how many there are and calls each one by name! The Lord is the everlasting God; creating all the world. Those who trust in the Lord for help will find their strength renewed. They will rise on wings like eagles; they will run and not get weary; they will walk and not grow weak.

Those words, "Do you not know? Have you not heard?" send shivers up and down my spine.

Imagine Jesus as a young boy hearing those words.

Imagine us saying those words to each other.

Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

Who in our circles needs to know?

Who in our communities need to hear?

Hear the Good News of God's love and grace for them.

Listen to a couple of experiences I have had recently.

Stories that combine the themes from these two readings.

Most of you know that I take belly dance lessons in our gym... we are a mixture of ages from teens to my age... most of them know by now that I am the minister here, and as far as I know, not many of them are involved in any sort of faith community.

A week or so ago, I overheard one dancer talking about what a difficult time her sister was having.

When she finished that conversation, I went over to her and asked her if her sister was the kind of person that would appreciate a prayer shawl.

She hadn't ever heard of a prayer shawl...

I explained that different women knit or crocheted shawls, praying while they were doing so and trusting that the recipient would feel wrapped in God's love when they wore it.

That we gave to people in times of joy and celebration as a symbol of our concern and love.

She said she thought her sister would appreciate one and I asked if her sister had a favourite colour and said I would bring one to the next class.

The next week, shortly before class, I went and chose one... put it in a bag along with a brochure about the prayer shawl ministry, and brought it down to the gym.

When she saw it, she asked how much it was to buy one... and I don't blame her for the question... we live in a very transactional society, where almost everything is a commodity to be bought and sold.

When I explained that there no cost, but rather it was one of our ways of extending God's love, she got tears in her eyes and gave me a heartfelt hug.

She hadn't heard the good news that God's grace was for everyone.

Another story... every couple of weeks I go to Cora's for breakfast... it's a time set apart to read and reflect upon some aspect of my relationship with God and ministry, so of course I usually have a book with me.

Because I go on the same day and time I usually wind up with the same server.

One day, she asked me if I was a pastor, I smiled and said yes, and asked her how my cover had been blown. ;-)

She told me that I was always reading something to do with Jesus.

Now when I see her, she always has some faith related question for me...

Which is wonderful... and yet, that breakfast at Cora's was my retreat from the demands of ministry... it was one way that I spent time with God... and now it has become another aspect of ministry...

And so I need to find another way of retreating to a 'lonely place...'

Opportunities abound for us to share the Good News of God's love... wherever we are.

Opportunities for you and for me.

By Jesus' example we are shown that time taken to be with our God is not time wasted.

It is that time that empowers us to share the Good News.

It is that time that empowers us to say:

Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

This is Good News.

And to this God, be all honor and glory, world without end, amen.

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