

Jesus the Healer            Isaiah 40:27-31        Mark 1:29-39

This week as we continue our look at Jesus' early ministry in the Gospel according to Mark. Today's reading shows Jesus doing a great deal of work as a healer and it draws many to him. The first person identified as being cured of a disease is Simon's Mother-in-Law, The fever from which she is suffering leaves her, and she serves Jesus and the disciples. This leads to the first observation about Jesus, the Healer. In the most prominent accounts, when a person is released from their disease by Jesus they are released to do something. They either immediately begin to serve others like Simon's Mother-in-Law or to testify publically to God's goodness by telling their story... Though as we follow Jesus, the healer not all those cured go on to serve.

The second observation is that Jesus is said to cure many people of their diseases. But notice it does not say all who came were cured of their diseases. Some of our sisters and brothers in faith teach that Jesus always cures disease if we have enough faith. But in the scripture people came to Jesus with faith, and not all were not cured, but I think all we're healed. Now this may sound like non-sense, but let me explain. We English speakers sometimes use the words heal and cure interchangeably, but this is not accurate, especially in the Biblical sense. Curing is ending or overcoming a disease. Simon's Mother-in-Law was cured as were many who came to Jesus, but Jesus' love and care brought healing to all because healing means to make whole, or make complete. Now in Western Thought based on Greek philosophy equated being whole with being perfect or cured but for Jesus, living in the Jewish culture, viewed being made whole as being made in right relationship with oneself, others and God. This is what wholeness means. In hospice work we often talk of patients experiencing healing. We do not mean they don't die from their disease, we mean that they have come to terms with their death; they have made connection with family – forgiven and found forgiveness, or they have come to accept their impending death and are able to celebrate their life or perhaps they have found the love and peace God offers and they are ready to

let themselves go into the awaiting arms of Love and Mercy and Grace. I think Jesus cures many diseases, but his work as a healer is for all and goes much deeper.

This leads to a third observation about casting out demons. This is a good opportunity to talk about how we view scripture written so long ago. From the Biblical descriptions of those plagued by demons, our modern minds see that some seem to suffer from seizure disorders - a specific type of disease, while other's actions seem to point to mental health issues – diseases of the mind. Now in Jesus' time these were not understood as diseases – but instead are seen as attacks on the person's spirit or soul by an outside spiritual force – a demon. But long after Jesus' time science showed us that these types of disease have a biological basis, and so we as an enlightened people dismiss the idea of demon possession. But we must be a bit careful, because we cannot totally dismiss the idea of a spiritual component perhaps even a spiritual cause to some disease. In the last few decades medical science is beginning to reclaim the spiritual aspects understood by earlier healers and now understands that diseases are not just physical phenomenon, but have psychological – social and, yes, spiritual components. Sometimes in my hospice work, a spouse of a patient will die very soon after their loved one. We would say they died of a broken heart, and one academic study actually found physical changes to hearts caused by grief. This is why when you are in Hospice Care your caregiver is also considered a patient, and the team is not only a Doctor, a Nurse and a Nurses Aide, but a Social Worker, Volunteers to provide interaction and support and a Spiritual Care provider. We humans are complex creations. Even in primary care, some of the most forward thinking practices are using similar trans-disciplinary teams to care for patients, because suffering can occur in many different ways. So we must not throw out the idea of spiritual disease, indeed some would say our role as church is to help individuals and society overcome the extremely spiritual diseases of greed and lust for power and addiction.

As we read more stories of healing in the Gospels, I encourage you to watch for the subtle differences between curing and healing. Often, both occur in one episode, but

not always. Sometimes it is only one person who experiences being made whole, even when many are cured.

Healing is beautifully described by our Hebrew scripture from Isaiah. Like many of the Psalm, it begins not with lofty words of faith, but honestly revealing doubts: Isaiah hears the people saying, “Why has God abandoned us. Why is God not helping us.” And then like all good prophets, Isaiah reminds them who they are talking about:

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

Adonai is the everlasting God,

the Creator of the ends of the earth.

God does not faint or grow weary;

her understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint,

and strengthens the powerless.

Even youths will faint and be weary,

and the young will fall exhausted;

but those who wait for Adonai shall renew their strength,

they shall mount up with wings like eagles,

they shall run and not be weary,

they shall walk and not faint.

This week I saw an eagle fly over our building as I was leaving one evening, and just yesterday Fred Damianos told me you can see a huge eagle’s nest in one of our trees. God has sent a message to us of hope and healing. No matter how long it takes, the world moves with fits and starts toward ultimate healing.

What areas of your life need healing today? If Jesus came to Faith UCC, what would you identify as needing healing? Some of us are fighting physical ailments and seeking to recover from procedures. Some are weighed down with concern for others, perhaps you are caring for a loved one or a friend needs special support now. Maybe you are walking in the valley of mental illness, facing despair or depression... or

battling the disease of addiction. Others are burdened with grief for the death of family members or a relationship or a dream.

Healing, wholeness does not often come easily or quickly, Oh sometimes there are miraculous moments of release or revelation, but often these are the result of long wrestling and struggle, but however long it takes, God wants us to be whole. God wants us to run and not be weary and to walk and not faint. With honesty and with patience we ask God for healing for ourselves, for our community, and for our world. We may not always see it, but God is at work, every single minute in every single place. God does not grow faint or weary. Jesus the Healer shows us that those who wait upon God will renew their strength they will mount up with wings like eagles. AMEN

Mark 1:29-39

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31 He 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. 33 And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34 And 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.

A Preaching Tour in Galilee

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