

### Call to Worship

Have you not known? Have you not heard? We serve the everlasting God, the Creator, who does not faint or grow weary; whose understanding is unsearchable.

**God gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.**

Others may faint and grow weary, and some will fall exhausted.

**But we who wait for God shall renew our strength, we shall mount up with wings like eagles, we shall run and not be weary, we shall walk and not faint.**

### Prayer of Invocation

**Divine Creator, we yearn for a deeper relationship with you. As we enter your presence, we pray for unshakable faith and confidence in your love and in your power to save. May we be strengthened by the power of your Holy Spirit. Grant us the fullness of your saving grace, we pray. Amen.**

### The Word

Mark 1:29-39

Common English

After leaving the synagogue, Jesus, James, and John went home with Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed, sick with a fever, and they told Jesus about her at once. He went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her, and she served them.

**That evening, at sunset, people brought to Jesus those who were sick or demon-possessed. The whole town gathered near the door. He healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases, and he threw out many demons. But he didn't let the demons speak, because they recognized him.**

Early in the morning, well before sunrise, Jesus rose and went to a deserted place where he could be alone in prayer. Simon and those with him tracked him down. When they found him, they told him, "Everyone's looking for you!"

**He replied, "Let's head in the other direction, to the nearby villages, so that I can preach there too. That's why I've come." He traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and throwing out demons.**

### Living the Word

Jesus heals! Really...it's true! Rev. John Smallman tells this story: She was a striking woman with long curly pink hair – yes, pink! - Holding a very small 'sausage dog.' We'd seen her the day before, standing beside an old black 1948 Chevrolet. Wendy and I had both thought she looked like a friend who lived in Oregon. And then I noticed that her car had Oregon license plates too.

It was too much of a coincidence. I had to strike up a conversation with her and her husband. When she learned I was a minister, she told us about her pet chicken. Pink hair, pet chicken? I swear it – it's all true! She had had this pet chicken since it was a tiny chick. But it had never been able to stand up. Now it was about 18 months old. It still kept falling over every time it tried to stand up. "That chicken used to get so angry and frustrated," she told us.

So she decided to take it to church – to a healing service. Six men laid hands on her chicken, with healing oil and all. (Really, I'm not making this up.) Still that chicken couldn't stand up. Six months later, they were attending another church. She approached the minister and asked if he'd do a healing on the chicken.

He told her it wouldn't be necessary. He had no special powers by virtue of his ordination. If there was faith for healing, she had it herself, he said. She should just go home and lay her own hands on the chicken, and bless her pet. So she did. And the next day the chicken walked quite normally, as it has ever since. The striking pink-haired woman told us all this very matter-of-factly...

Rev. Smallman continued by saying: I'm struck by how matter-of-factly the Bible talks about Jesus' healings. Surely they must have seemed just as unbelievable to those hearing about them for the first time, as the story of the healing of the chicken did to me. Told by a striking, pink-haired woman; holding a small sausage dog. And the tellers of those healings probably had to reassure their hearers just as often as I did that they weren't making all of this up."

Let's take another look at the scripture story. Just before today's verses we are told that it was the Jewish Sabbath Day, and Jesus was at the Synagogue teaching. All who heard him were astounded as he preached - as one who had personal authority - not like the law experts. Then, on the Sabbath, in the Synagogue he confronts someone who is controlled by a demon spirit and Jesus casts out the demon right then and there.

It was also the Jewish custom for the main Sabbath meal to be eaten at noon, right after the Synagogue service, yet by Jewish law it was prepared the day before. When they arrived at Simon's home, Jesus and his church friends, ready for some food and fellowship (sounds kinda Methodist), they found that Simon's wife's mother was down with a fever... Jesus heals her... She is no sooner healed than she begins to attend to them. She used her recovered health for renewed service, to restore others. There is a great Scottish family that has the motto "Saved to Serve."

It is a great image of Jesus 'lifting up' the downtrodden and the ill. Particularly in the way that Jesus did it. He didn't go to the temple and set up a booth. He went to where the people were. There was commonality there, because he was with them. People could tell he was genuine in his compassion. He wasn't just sitting there, writing a check, or sending a box of blankets, or waiting for the hurting to come to him. He was with them.

In the mean time, word of the events in the Synagogue got out and crowds began to gather outside Simon's house. They did wait until evening because the law forbade the carrying of any burden - physical or spiritual - on the Sabbath Day. It was considered work and work was forbidden on the Sabbath. Yet Jesus has broken the law by healing twice already during this day.

Even so it is evening and the whole community has arrived with some to be healed physically and some to be healed spiritually. Edward Livingston Trudeau, a distinguished American Physician said that the duty of medicine is "Sometimes to heal, often to afford relief, and always to bring comfort."

When you are a healer of any kind, holding off for any reason when you can help is against the essence of who you are. It has been said that a doctor's duty is "to help us live and to die" and we are always living and dying.

Jesus never separated the soul and the body. We are both and we need to be redeemed as whole persons, not just a part of us. He goes out 'preaching and healing'. They are connected together. Jesus was a radical, though still a faithful Jew by attending the Synagogue on the Sabbath and taking himself apart for prayer.

Early the next morning, while it was still dark, Jesus, who probably wasn't sleeping well as he continued to see all of the healing that needed to be done, steps out, away from the potential of the next crowd, and heals himself by taking time to renew with God. He is ahead of everyone else, with lots on his mind and in his heart.

Jesus also had to get it clear in his mind what was to be done next. With all of the healing he had done here, of course there wasn't enough done. Physical miracles of healing were seen, but spiritual miracles of healing are hard to see. Was it enough to restore wholeness and move God's kingdom forward?

Conferring with God helped him to prioritize the day ahead, to process all that had happened the day before and to know the next step. Morning came and Jesus was missing. The man of miracles had disappeared. How strange, so they search for him.

When they find him he has no excuses or explanations, though they know him to be praying. Jesus moves them forward to the next place down the road and after that the next and the next throughout Galilee. Jesus didn't stay until everything was fixed. He healed the sick, cast out demons, preached the Good News, took time to heal himself through eating, resting and praying and then moved on. Jesus had healing powers from God, but it also took something out of him. He needed to get away and reconnect to his power source...God.

Henri Nouwen, in his final journal, on March 28, 1996 wrote the following reflection: "During [Communion] this morning we talked about God's covenant. God says, "I am your God and will be faithful to you even when you won't be faithful to me."

Through human history, this divine faithfulness is shown to us in God's increasing desire for [an intimate relationship with us]. At first God was the God for us, our protector and shield. Then, when Jesus came, God became the God with us, our companion and friend. Finally, when Jesus sent his Spirit, God was revealed to us as the God within us - our very breath and heartbeat.

"Our life is full of brokenness – broken relationships, broken promises, broken expectations. How can we live that brokenness without becoming bitter and resentful except by returning again and again to God's faithful presence in our lives? Without this 'place' of return, our journey easily leads us to darkness and despair. But with this safe and solid home, we can keep renewing our faith, and keep trusting that the many setbacks of life move us forward to an always greater bond with the God of the covenant."

Do you want to be healed – both physically and spiritually? How do we hear healing stories when we haven't been healed ourselves? *Jesus is our Health Insurance. He doesn't keep us from getting sick, but covers the costs of the healing.* (repeat) Maybe Jesus began the healing, but the rest of the work involves our participation.

Maybe you are broken in some way, still you can be a healer. Psychologist Carl Jung used the term 'wounded healer:' someone who can, in identification of his own wounds, create a sanctuary in order to treat others. No one can understand arthritis as well as one who suffers with it. No one can know what it feels like to suffer with depression, as well as someone who does.

A recovering alcoholic knows the trials, risks and temptations that this world offers, and they often are called to minister to others. A wounded healer can see through and past their pain to help heal another. You may remember with me, Superman... Christopher Reeves, who was paralyzed physically throughout his body after a horseback riding accident. He continued to be an inspiration to many as his spirit was so strong though his body was ravaged. Has God called you to be a wounded healer?

Healing, as shaman – doctors of the spiritual, have long maintained, is the business of soul retrieval. We think of healing in terms of health: back to our original condition, as good as new. Christ's healing takes us from our original condition as people in an unhealthy conflict with God and transforms us into God's own children.

Jesus calls us out of our sin, guilt, sickness and shame. He calls us by his own grace to become strong, whole-healed persons. He completes in us that which is lacking. Christ makes us what we could never be on our own.

"Hear the Good News:"God's faithfulness is shown to us in the healing power of Christ. God reaches out to us in life's joys and struggles and the scripture invites us to place our trust in the assurance of God's presence and faithfulness. God's power and presence is with us always, we are given opportunities to be people of healing for others. God's power is available to us in ways we don't even begin to tap into.

We are offered the choice to place our hope in God, 'wait for the Lord', 'go to pray.' God is faithful, but often doesn't work how and when we think things should happen. Think of the times in your life when you have 'let go and let God' handle your burdens, grief or pain. Were you lifted up by a sense of God's presence?

Jesus wants to 'lift us up' just as he did for Simon's mother-in-law; physically and spiritually. This is the work of Christ the healer. It is radical in every sense and it can change our lives. The work doesn't end when we have received the healing gift of Christ, because we, too, become healers. God makes us agents of God's healing in the world.

Gerald May, a medical doctor in Washington DC, writes of the importance of community in the healing process: "God's grace through community involves something far greater than other people's support and perspective. The power of grace is nowhere as brilliant nor as mystical as in communities of faith.

It's power includes not just love that comes from people through the people, but love that pours forth among people, as if through the very spaces between one person and the next. Just to be in such an atmosphere is to be bathed in healing power."

In the service of Holy Communion we see that we are all broken. Christ is present to heal us, but you have to want to be healed. At the end of this scripture passage, we find the disciples still searching and Jesus praying and leading them forward. They aren't ready yet to trust their new leader and absorb all that is happening right before them.

So it is Ok if you are still processing all of this for awhile. But this morning, when it is time, come and receive the bread and the cup as a sign that you are ready to receive something you can't quite understand, yet you know is present through Christ. In time it will come clearer.

While you are searching for answers this week, here are some questions for you to begin with: Do I want to be healed? Is God calling me to be a healer of some kind and am I willing to heal others?