

February 4, 2018

Pastor Erin Bouman, Irving Park Lutheran Church, Boy Scout Sunday

Mark 1:29-39

## Moving Day

Jesus is on the move, going from place to place, proclaiming, healing, casting out demons. There's a busy, breathless quality to today's gospel, right off the bat, starting, as it does, with a rapid change in scene. We enter today's story mid-stride, we're already walking as the reading begins with Jesus moving, quickly, from synagogue to bedside. But though there's a bed, it's not a scene of repose. It's a sick bed. In it is the mother-in-law of Simon Peter.

I need to pause here for a moment, pause the action on this point: that Simon Peter had a mother-in-law. Because if Peter, the disciple who went on to be a key leader of the early church, if Peter had a mother-in-law, he also had a wife. I just always find it interesting to note that the guy who, in church tradition, became known as the first pope, was married.

But we must return to the scene at hand lest the swiftly moving Jesus move on without us. And in fact Jesus is already in the sickroom, is walked determinedly towards the person lying there, motionless, burning up yet frozen, immobilized by illness. He reaches her side, takes her by the hand, and lifts her up. And the fever leaves her, and she is able to move, do things, serve.

And Jesus moves on, heals many more people, who are sick in all kinds of ways, illnesses of body, mind, and spirit. Jesus' day is packed with people to see. The next day, as busy people often do, he gets up very early. Jesus starts the day with solitary time, centering time, time in prayer. Even that doesn't last long. His disciples track him down, now they're moving, too, telling him there are people who want to see him. Jesus has already started walking as he checks his planner, it's booked with appointments in neighboring towns, that's what he's there to do, he reminds them, and they're to come, too. And he's off again, teaching and healing throughout Galilee.

Another pause, on Galilee, on how a great seminary professor I had would refer to it. Her classes were a workout; it was all you could do to keep up with her. As she lectured, she would pace around the classroom with this compact, tattered New Testament held in her hand, and she would read from it in its original language, Greek, and translate directly on her feet. When she got to passages like the one we just heard she would say that he was teaching and healing throughout "The Galilee." That's what she called it, always, "The Galilee." Because that's what the Biblical text actually says, the Greek includes an article. But I think she also said it like that to call attention to it, make it stick in our minds, remind us this geographical term encompasses a broad swath, a large and even amorphous area, much more varied than we might imagine... something like "the northwest side." Jesus went throughout "The Galilee," teaching and healing, always doing, always moving.

This brisk movement of chapter one will continue in what comes after, is entirely characteristic of the gospel according to Mark, a gospel in which Jesus is hard to pin down. His very identity is elusive, a secret. Few know who he is and the demons who do don't get to talk about it. Jesus doesn't waste his breath on interminable conversations with unclean spirits, not when there are so many people to see, and teach, and heal. He doesn't get stuck on what's not worth his time, he keeps moving. In fact, in this gospel, Jesus is so on the move he doesn't even show up at his own resurrection. When the women get to the tomb in the gospel of Mark they see not Jesus, but a messenger, who tells them, "He left already." He's has places to go, things to do.

So also with Peter's mother-in-law, after Jesus lifted her up. After Jesus takes her by the hand the Biblical text tells us, "The fever left her, and she began to serve them." Now at first read, this part might make us pause. As a female pastor friend of mine puts it, "She's just out of her sick bed and no one else could do the dishes?!" Which is a fair point, but not what the text says, literally. It doesn't mention dishes, it says that she began to serve, the Greek word for serve being *diakoneia*, from which we get the word *deacon*, which is a word for a church leader. If Peter was the first pope, he had a model in his mother-in-law, who took her cue from the one who lifted her up, Jesus. Jesus, who at a momentous point later on in the gospel, describes himself in this way: "For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve." That's the model Jesus gives. Pope Francis uses this same model, when he washes the feet of refugees, and prison inmates, and people of other faiths. Pope Francis takes his cue there from Jesus, who in another gospel said, "Here is your example," and then washed his disciple's feet. For Jesus, the word "serve" defines true leadership, explains what it he has come to do.

And if you'll bear with me for one more bit of word study, walk back with me to the bedside of Peter's mother-in-law; look again at what Jesus does after he takes her by the hand. According to what we just heard, "he lifted her up." "Lifted," is an accurate rendition. "He lifted her up," is a fair translation, but it may miss a connection with what happens later—with what happens to Jesus later—at the end of the gospel. That is, here in chapter one, we find a word translated "lifted." That very same word is used, in the very last chapter of the gospel, to describe what happened to Jesus, after the cross and tomb. He was raised. A direct translation of what Jesus does here in the sick room is, "He raised her up."

She was raised, and then she served. Resurrection makes new action, new movement, healed movement, possible. So also, on Easter Day, when the women at the tomb are told, "He left already," they're told, "He's on the move, again, as always, and more." And there's yet more to what the women are told, the messenger also tells them, literally, "He's gone ahead of you to 'The Galilee,' there you will see him." There you will see him, in what he is doing, in the places he does it. And so the women are sent, we are sent, back to the beginning, back to "The Galilee," back to where and how Jesus began his ministry, proclaiming, healing, casting out demons, taking by the hand and lifting up, raising. Resurrection doesn't end the story, it begins it again. Resurrection is for doing. Resurrection is for living.

That's where it hits home for us, in our busy lives, in "The Northwest Side," in "The Midwest," in "The United States." All too often we operate, we move, we go from place to place at a feverish pitch. That's not the message of the gospel. When Peter's mother-in-law is healed the fever leaves her. And then it is that her action takes on deeper meaning. She is raised, and then she serves. So also for us. We can pause sometimes, we must pause, as Jesus did, take a breath, pray. We do that here, that's what Sunday morning worship is: a centering time, and a healing time. As with Peter's mother-in-law we too are healed, as we take in our hands Christ's very life, as we hear Christ's promise: You have been raised. God gives us this here, and then sends us into life, so that when worship ends, service begins.