

“Raised Up”
Isaiah 40:21-31; Mark 1:29-39
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I don't know about you, but I am challenged by stories about healing in the Bible. If Jesus can heal Simon's mother-in-law, why doesn't he heal everyone who needs it? I know people who deserve to be healed and I bet you do, too -- whether from chronic pain, mental illness, addiction or a broken heart. Why is it that some people healed and others not?

The answer in today's story isn't obvious. There is no suggestion here that Simon's mother-in-law prayed for healing or that her faith was strong -- only the claim that Jesus took her by the hand and lifted her up.

This story, in particular, presents a challenge for me because it seems to justify the view that a woman's place is in the kitchen. Jesus heals her and immediately she gets up and serves the men. A nameless woman, to boot. Is she so unimportant that she is identified not by her name but by her relationship to a man? Some have, and still today, used passages like this to discourage and, in some cases, prevent women from assuming leadership roles outside the home, including the church.

But here's the thing. Well, several things, actually.

The Greek word Mark uses to describe what Jesus does for Simon's mother-in-law is the same word that describes what God does for Jesus on the day of resurrection, as in he raises her up. Also the word Mark uses to describe what this woman does after she is raised up is the same word that describes what Jesus does and what he calls us to do, as in she serves.

Oh, and then there's this. This woman is the first person Jesus heals.

Just as he did with a demon in last week's reading, this week, Jesus calls on the boundary-breaking power of God to heal Simon's mother-in-law, demonstrating once again God's desire to defeat anything that keeps us from well-being, from wholeness.

Far from limiting her role in his ministry, Jesus elevates Simon's mother-in-law as model of the kind of life Jesus calls us to emulate.. A careful reading of the passage reveals that

Simon's mother-in-law does not serve because she has to, because she is compelled to, because someone asks her to, because that's her supposed place.

She serves because this is what discipleship looks like. She serves, showing us what following Jesus will really mean.¹

Jesus has called Simon and Andrew and James and John to be disciples, but he chooses Simon's mother-in-law to show them what that means.

It's not just a story about how Jesus heals a woman from her fever. It's also a story of restoration. And whether we want to admit it or not, all of us are broken in some way and in need of restoration, in need of being raised up to new life.

I remember feeling like something was out of whack in my own life when I was in my late 20's. I had this great job and it paid well and I got to hang with some folks at the top of their profession. Big houses, fancy cars, first class business trips and an office on the 48th floor with floor to ceiling windows, I thought I had it made.

But I was miserable. And no matter what I did – nothing ever really filled the gaping hole in me. Something was gnawing at me, but I pressed on hoping that whatever it was would just go away.

It took me several years to figure out why my life felt so fractured. I was trying to be someone I was not. I hardly knew who I was because I just kept stuffing her back inside so I could conform to the expectations and project the kind of image those expectations required of me.

At my lowest point, someone gently nudged me. "If there were no obstacles, what would you want to do with your life?" I couldn't say.

I had been doing what everyone else thought I should do for so long that I could not say for myself anymore. And by that time, I had resisted the call to change for so long that the physical pain in my back sent me to the emergency room. And that's when I knew something had to give.

For every story like mine, there are many, many more. Perhaps you, too, have wrestled with the expectations of others, trying to conform yourself to an image of someone you are not. Or maybe you know someone who has.

¹ Karoline Lewis, "A Call Story," from *Dear Working Preacher*, February 4, 2018 (<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5052>).

Just as Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law, he comes to heal our brokenness, whatever form it takes. He raises us up to new life, a resurrected life in which we can be the person Jesus calls us to be.

Reflecting on today's story, Karoline Lewis asks,

What if resurrection is being raised up to be who you always were and were always meant to be? It won't be hilltop houses, driving 15 cars or bathrooms you can play baseball in ...but the radical, emotional, incredible feeling of being you. That being raised up is not just some sort of spiritual future but your present reality, here and now, to live *you*. Your mind, spirit, body, everything together, everything that you were always meant to be. The story of Simon's mother-in-law tells us that God does not call us to be something we are not but is in the business of restoring us to who we really are.²

Dani, an alcoholic and addict tells her story on a website called "Heroes in Recovery".

My addiction brought me to places I would have never thought I would have been. I became homeless, hopeless and helpless. I would dumpster dive to find food, clothes and items I could use to "build a home" in an alley. I thought the way I was living was as much "living" as I could do, but really I was just "existing" barely... I had lost all contact with my loved ones, I thought the other homeless drug users were my "friends" and I thought the drugs I used were my "true love". I thought prayer was asking God to help me survive one more night so I could use one more day.

After a year in rehab, I learned how to wake up at a regular time every day, eat breakfast, attend 12 Step meetings and groups that were all based around learning how to love myself so I could become a useful person to others I learned how to get a job and pay my own way. I learned how to get honest with myself and others, I learned how to build a belief system, values and morals that were true and aligned with love. ... I just wanted to feel love, but in order to feel love I had to give love to others and in order to do that, I had to love myself first. I worked the 12 steps of AA and started to get an understanding of myself, who I was, who I wanted to be and what I wanted in life.

² Karoline Lewis, "On Being Restored to Yourself," from *Dear Working Preacher*, February 1, 2015 (<https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3520>)

Today, I now work at the rehab I spent the first year of my sobriety in. On a daily basis I GET to give back what was freely given to me in the program of AA. I GET to live the principles of the program on a daily basis, I GET to help others find their ways, I GET to be of service to others in this world. I GET to spend time with my loved ones, I GET to take care of a cat, I GET to be in a healthy loving relationship with a man who truly cares about me, and I GET to show true love back to him. I GET to pray for others before myself, I GET to pray to be of maximum service to others. ...³

This is not just a healing story. It is a call to discipleship.

Jesus doesn't heal just to heal, just to prove himself, or just to confirm God's activity in the world. Jesus heals for the sake of, because of, and assuming that the Kingdom of God is here -- and that we are a part of it, that we have a role in it, and Jesus needs us.

And as it turns out, and what Simon's mother-in-law reveals, is that this role looks an awful lot like how Jesus himself will describe his own ministry, his own power, and his own presence, "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).⁴

May it be so for us as well.

³ Dani L. "By the Grace of God and the Universe," January 15, 2018 (<http://heroesinrecovery.com/stories/by-the-grace-of-god-and-the-universe/>)

⁴ Karoline Lewis, "A Call Story," from *Dear Working Preacher*, February 4, 2018 (<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5052>).