

Welcome to our podcast today,

A lot happened in the first week of Jesus' public ministry.

There is so much going on in chapter 1 of Mark.

His teaching in the synagogue last week

and now we see him healing,

how prayer is important in his life

and the urgency for travelling all around to share his gospel message

To turn away from your sins and believe the good news.

(pause)

Let's pray

Loving Father we come together now to meet with you.

To be in your presence.

(pause)

We come to pray to you,

And just to sit in contemplation of all that you are.

(pause)

Father as we hear the Bible being read help us to listen.

Help us to hear you speak.

Change us through your word.

Transform us inwardly.

(pause)

We're listening Father.

Listening to what you are trying to teach us through Jesus words and actions.

Amen.

(pause)

Our reading today is from Mark's gospel, reading from chapter 1.29 to verse 39. I'm reading from the Good News Translation of the bible.

Jesus and his disciples, including James and John, left the synagogue and went straight to the home of Simon and Andrew. 30 Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever, and as soon as Jesus arrived, he was told about her. 31 He went to her, took her by the hand, and helped her up. The fever left her, and she began to wait on them. 32 After the sun had set and evening had come, people brought to Jesus all the sick and those who had demons. 33 All the people of the town gathered in front of the house. 34 Jesus healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases and drove out many demons. He would not let the demons say anything, because they knew who he was. 35 Very early the next morning, long before daylight, Jesus got up and left the house. He went out of town to a lonely place, where he prayed. 36 But Simon and his companions went out searching for him, 37 and when they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you." 38 But Jesus answered, "We must go on to the other villages around here.

I have to preach in them also, because that is why I came." 39 So he traveled all over Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and driving out demons.

Going to listen to the sermon on this passage from Rev Teri Peterson, St John's, Gourock - this is from a service put together by the Moderator Martin Fair.

Hello friends, I'm Teri Peterson, minister of St. John's in Gourock, and I am so grateful to the Moderator for the invitation to be here, and to you for joining me as we encounter God's living word together today.

I'd like to start by asking you to imagine a scene — one that may feel strange just now, as it's something we haven't been able to do in nearly a year, but try to picture it:

people spilling out of a building — a church, a theatre, a comedy club, a concert — out into the street, milling around talking to each other about what they saw and what they heard inside.

The group eventually disperses as they head to different places to continue their conversations with friends, at the pub, on the bus, walking home.

(pause)

That sabbath day the people spilled out of the synagogue into the streets of Capernaum with more than enough to talk about for the rest of the day, the rest of the week. They had seen something amazing!

Simon and Andrew headed home, with their business partners James and John, like they always did, going for their traditional Saturday lunch, and they were lucky enough to be first to invite the guest preacher round for a roast.

Imagine them talking about all they had seen and heard that morning, chatting away as they walked home, and everyone else in town doing the same, though looking enviously after them, wishing they had been able to invite Jesus themselves.

Once in the house, things took a bit of a turn. It's hard to have a roast ready when the matriarch of the family is ill.

This moment in the gospel is the only time we get a glimpse of the disciples' private family lives —

Simon Peter must have been married, in order to have a mother-in-law, though we never hear anything about his wife or any children.

His mother-in-law might have been a widow, she was living with Peter and Andrew and there's no father-in-law mentioned.

In any case, many of us have experienced what it's like to be unwell and need to stay separate from the rest of the household,

and we know especially now, that one of the major difficulties with illness is how isolated we feel.

When Peter took Jesus in to see her, Jesus did the very thing she likely longed for,

and that we are constantly being told not to do just now — he reached out and touched her hand!

What it actually says is that he raised her up — and she began to serve them.

He raised her up — words we have heard before.

The psalmist says “you raised me up from the miry pit.”

Isaiah says “you raise me up on wings like eagles.”

And, of course, at the end of the gospel the angels tell the women at the empty tomb, “Jesus is not here, he has been raised.”

He raised her up, and she began to serve.

Now I used to think “great, she was just desperately ill a few minutes ago, and now she has to make the dinner? Can’t these young men do anything for themselves?”

But actually, it doesn't say she just got up and cooked for them, it says she ministered to them.

It's the same word that describes how the angels ministered to Jesus in the wilderness during his forty days of fasting,

and the word for how women provided for and enabled Jesus' ministry,

and it's the word for Jesus' famous teaching "the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve."

And that word is deacon. So Jesus raised her up, and she began to deacon —

to minister through service.

(pause)

Peter's mother-in-law is the first human in the gospel to respond to him in this way —

to recognise that her raising was for a purpose larger than herself.

She was restored to health, and to her rightful place as matriarch,

but also to her God-given calling to be one who acts like Jesus, who came to serve.

Having encountered his powerful grace, she turned around and shared it with others —

something her son-in-law and his eleven fellows never quite figured out, as they continually misunderstood and argued about who was the best and tried to get Jesus to fit their mould of a Messiah, rather than being themselves moulded in his image.

This is not to say only those with the title “deacon” are called to minister in this way, but rather that like Peter’s mother-in-law,

deacons model for all of us what a faithful response to Jesus looks like in tangible, practical service.

The mother-in-law acts like angels, and like Jesus, when she is raised up to serve.

Not a moment too soon, either, because the instant the sun set, marking the end of the Sabbath, all those people who wished they could have had Jesus round for tea flocked to the front door —

people who were curious, people who had sick loved ones, people who were being harassed by demonic voices, people who were ill.

(pause)

Now I want to talk for a minute about one of the most difficult things that we modern people read in the gospels and that's about people possessed by demons.

Sometimes we know that was a pre-scientific explanation for certain illnesses.

But it's clear that people in biblical times did not believe all illness to be caused by demons,

and they also didn't believe that all demon possession resulted in illness.

Sometimes like in this case, they use a word that could be translated “demonised” — in a similar sense of terrorised, like being harassed by demons.

And that is something I think we still know about today.

Sometimes those voices that harass are meant to make people feel like outsiders, like they are “other”, a “them” against our “us.”

Those voices swirl about in our public discourse and our private conversations, sometimes purposefully and sometimes unintentionally making people feel they are less-than, unwanted, not good enough, different in a bad way.

And sometimes those voices worm their way in to our minds and hearts, and we start to believe them. And that starts to change us and how we talk about ourselves and about others, to change how we behave, to change how we feel.

And pretty soon we don't need anyone else to tell us how unloveable or dangerous or what a failure we are, because we're telling ourselves...and then turning those same words on anyone else who is even more different, that we can make out to be below us.

When we are possessed by these demons, it can be hard to see that anything is wrong, it's just the way things are, and we don't understand why people want to be "politically correct," or inclusive, or work for justice that would level the playing field for all.

Yet the gospel says that when Jesus encountered such demons, he would not allow them to speak, because they recognised him.

They still recognised Truth, with a capital T, and it scared them. These demons do not want to be confronted with truth, because they know it will be their end. So they do everything they can to avoid it and to discredit the truth...but Jesus didn't listen or make room for both sides, he cast them out and forced them into silence.

I wonder if being freed from those voices felt like being raised up. Like a weight had been lifted, a curtain opened, a breath of fresh air sweeping in. And what it might feel like now, for those demons to be confronted and silenced by the Truth that God is love, and all people are made in God's image and beloved and called.

Would it feel like such a raising up that we would immediately turn that lightness toward service? Toward ministering to others, and helping them encounter the Truth, and so spreading the good news?

Jesus says that he needs to go proclaim the message in other towns, because that is what he came out to do...and then proclaiming the message is always paired with casting out demons.

Speaking the truth of God's love always results in the silencing of those lying voices that tell us some people are less.

(pause)

Imagine, if you will, another scene.

Imagine the Body of Christ, speaking the truth of grace, love, and justice...

Imagine the body of Christ embodying the truth of God's desire for wholeness that leads to service...

Imagine the body of Christ insisting on truth that silences falsehoods of othering and marginalisation and me-first...

imagine proclaiming the message of God's abundant life for all, and what power and truth that might have in this world.

As Walt Disney said, "if you can dream it, you can do it."

As the Spirit opens our eyes to see this vision, Christ takes us by the hand and raises us up...and we are to respond in gratitude, by ministering to the world that God so loves, with truth.

May it be so. **Amen.**

Prayers of response - let us pray

People. People. Everywhere!

Day in. Day out.

Seeking you, Lord. Hunting you.

Following you.

Hungry for your presence.

Wanting your attention.

Yet not once did you complain.

(pause)

We're sorry, Lord, that the weight of life's demands causes us to stumble,

to lose our temper and at times to buckle under the pressure.

Help us to be more like you, Lord.

(pause)

We're sorry for not getting our priorities right.

Help us to know, as you did, the importance of spending time with and drawing refreshment from the Father.

(pause)

We're sorry for allowing other people and things to take over and squeeze out our time with you.

Help us to draw daily on your refreshing strength in order to cope with whatever our day holds.

(pause)

Help us Father to serve as Simon's mother-in-law did. To rise up and minister to our friends, neighbours and family.

To share our love of Jesus with them by caring for them and meeting their basic needs.

(pause)

Lord, hear our prayers. **Amen**

Benediction

Go now in Peace.

Stay safe.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father,
Son and Holy Spirit

be with you, and those you love today and
forevermore

Amen