

# “A Day in the Life”

*Valley Presbyterian Church – February 8, 2009*

Ordination / Installation of Church Officers

I Corinthians 12:2-7, 27

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Mark 1:29-39

The Beatles began their song, *A Day in the Life* like this: “woke up, got out of bed, dragged a comb across my head.”

But, here, we have day in the life of Jesus the Christ; a Sabbath day, no less. It begins back in verse 21 as Jesus goes to the synagogue and concludes the next morning when Jesus tells his new disciples that their mission of preaching and healing will extend beyond this town of Capernaum. Here, we see in this one, seemingly mundane day, glimpses of the mysterious; this is the Son of God who can take away from people their demons and diseases, and gives them in return a new awareness of purpose and peace.

There are, though, some possible pitfalls from reading the story of this particular day in the life of Jesus. For one, it seems only too typical of this era that a woman, Simon Peter’s mother-in-law, would be cured of her illness and then immediately prepare dinner for the men – Jesus and the four disciples – who have come into her home. We should not underestimate the danger of her illness: for a “fever” in those days would have been considered life-threatening. Notice the language, though; Jesus did not simply cast out the disease or pronounce her healed. Instead, he touched her: he took her by the hand and lifted her up out of the bed. I picture this not so much that Jesus literally picked her up, but that she was raised by the power of God from death to life; just as Jesus himself would be raised in the final chapter of Mark.

And so, right away – our text tells us – Simon’s mother-in-law began to serve them, to attend to their needs, to “deacon” them. This is the same word Mark used earlier to describe the angels who came to Jesus’ side while he was being tempted in the wilderness. This service is not menial work, but a holy calling. The woman in this story had been raised up not so that the men in the house might be served, but so that she might understand the joy in serving others. In this particular ministry, she joins Jesus as his first deacon and purest example of what he himself will later share with his disciples: that he came not to be served, but to serve others.<sup>1</sup>

Even though Jesus has moved from the synagogue to the privacy of Peter’s home, crowds of people still follow him. They come at sundown, when the Sabbath officially ended and when healing would be permitted. And yet, the Jesus we see in public is the same as we see in private. The Jesus who amazed people with his healing power in the synagogue also heals them on the doorstep of his disciples’ home. The location, time of day, and number of people around him do

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<sup>1</sup> Ofelia Ortega in *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, vol. 1

not change his goals and priorities. He wants the people to be made well, to be restored to health and wholeness.

We're told that on that evening, the whole town came out to see Jesus and that he healed many of them. Many is certainly more than a few, but it also is not everyone. This could mean that Jesus saw those who most needed healing: the lepers, the blind, the lame; but that the others had lesser needs. But, that's not the way that I see God working in the world today: people are not healed of their illness or disease based on greatest need or direst circumstance. For some people, the power of prayer works; for some people, modern medicine can overcome even the most deadly diseases. But not always; not for everyone.

“Of that crowd that stood at the door of Simon’s house, Jesus healed many, but not all. And even for those who were healed, it was only temporary. The lame who danced may later have become deaf, and the deaf who heard may later have become blind.”<sup>2</sup> Healing happens when symptoms of illness are taken away: either through the wonders of medicine or through divine intervention: both are gifts from God. But, there is also a second kind of healing; which is the refusal to be dominated by illness or suffering. If Jesus is truly Lord, then we are defined by our relationship with Christ, and not by our present circumstances. Instead of being a victim of this or a sufferer of that, we are known as children of God and disciples of Christ, and in this identity, we have a purpose and peace which passes all human understanding.

Finally, at the close of this busy day and even before the sun rises again, we discover that Jesus has retreated in prayer. Maybe Jesus was reflecting back on how one man had been cured of his demons in synagogue and the many witnesses who had been amazed. Maybe Jesus was thinking of the one woman who had been raised and responded with Christ-like service and the many more who came later to find healing. Maybe he was meditating about these four fishermen who had agreed to leave their nets behind and become his first disciples. We wonder if maybe he prayed: wishing he could have done more; or that he could have more helpers; or that the needs would not be so great; or that he could focus for a while just on teaching; or work his miracles only in the synagogue; or only during the day and have nights off.

All of this is speculation on our part, of course. A day in the life of Jesus: moving from place to place, trying to meet the needs of others, figuring when to follow the rules and when they can be broken, seeking to balance the public and private aspects of life, looking for time to get away and recharge his batteries; a day in the life of Jesus may appear similar in some ways to our own days, but not entirely. Peter Gomes, Dean of the Chapel at Harvard University, has written how he finds it an unfair burden when Christians try to answer for themselves the now infamous question: *what would Jesus do?* Act with compassion, love even our enemies, judge not lest ye be judged. We know these principles, but these are not the difficult decisions Jesus had to make, the things that only God – and the Son through the Father – could and do know.

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<sup>2</sup> Rev. Dr. Lance Stone, “On Healing”

Things like who will be healed and who will not? How much suffering can one person endure? And, when is it time to move on to the next town?

Gomes proposes that a better question for Christian disciples to ask themselves is: *what would Jesus have me do?*<sup>3</sup> When we read and hear the good news of the gospel, we need not try to put ourselves in Christ's shoes – or his sandals – but to look instead at the responses of those who he encountered, those he instructed, those he healed, and those he called to follow.

*What would Jesus have me do* today and tomorrow? Is it to serve in humble Christ-like obedience as Simon's mother-in-law chose to do? Is it to open the door of your home to those in your town who don't know where else to go? Is it to bring someone else who needs peace and purpose into God's presence and into the community of faith? Is it to rejoice that you have been healed, or that God has given you the strength not to let an infirmity rule over you? Is it to join Christ in communion with the Father in contemplative prayer or retreat? Is it to become a leader in the church so that it might more effectively witness to the good news and minister to the world? Is it to somehow strike a more healthy balance among your commitments to your vocation, your family, your church and your community?

As bearers of the good news of Jesus Christ, as witnesses to the presence of God in your life and the power of God in the lives of Christ's followers, may we continue asking ourselves: *what would Jesus have us do?* You and I and countless others have seen and heard that Jesus is Lord. May that our purpose, and our peace, come from Him. AMEN.

*Now to the One, who by the power at work within us is able to do fare more abundantly than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Jesus Christ to all generations, forever and ever. AMEN.*

(Ephesians 3:20-21)

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Gomes, interview in *The Harvard Bulletin*, January 2009