

## **Healing in Synagogue, Home and Town**

**Mark 1:21-39 by Patty Friesen (Feb 1, 2015)**

Jesus' ministry begins today with a healing in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach with authority and that put the evil spirits over the edge, as they cried out in protest, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!" The evil spirit seems to be one, I, but also many we. They know exactly who Jesus is and calling him out by name, they know exactly that he has come to destroy them. While they try to control Jesus by defining his name and his mission, later in chapter 5:9, Jesus extracts the evil spirits name, Legend – who are many.

Jesus' ministry is defined by this very first encounter with spiritual illness in the synagogue. He casts out the evil spirit and the people were all so amazed saying, "What is this new teaching and with authority. He gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." Ched Meyers in his Mark commentary, *Binding the Strong Man*, suggests that casting out demons was Jesus' primary healing ministry in Mark. More than malevolent boogeymen, the demons represented a whole order of spiritual blindness, and sickness and repression in the synagogue and society. The demons are sometimes called unclean spirits and there was a whole religious/social order of what

was clean and unclean as defined by the priests and scribes. Sick people and dead people were considered unclean and not to be touched. Menstrating women and other women caught in various sins were unclean and not to be touched. Touching something unclean made you unclean and there was a whole order of purification rituals to get you clean again. Jesus constantly challenges this notion of unclean by touching lepers, healing sickness, hanging out with women and sinners. They don't have the power to make him unclean. He has the power to make them clean.

In casting out the demon in the synagogue on the Sabbath, Jesus is cleaning house, making the unclean clean and that doesn't not only mean this single man with an evil spirit but the whole congregation. The synagogue is the religious turf of the scribes who do the teaching of what is unclean. Jesus takes control of the space and the teaching and casts out the old order and the old teaching and presents a new order and new teaching and everyone is amazed.

After the hubbub in the synagogue, Jesus retreats to Peter's house. Now Peter's mother in law was in bed with a fever. Maybe the fever came from all the commotion at morning worship in the synagogue. Maybe the fever came from seeing her son in law's new friends. Maybe the fever came from thinking about having to cook dinner for all them. As the head of the

house, Peter should have been the one to take charge of his mother in law's illness but the relatives tell Jesus about it and Jesus immediately takes charge of the situation like he did in the synagogue. He enters the most intimate room in the house, the bedroom – unclean and takes the wick woman by the hand – unclean and helped her up – unclean. The fever left her and she was healed and restored to for her ministry to her household.

Peter's mother in law is the first woman to appear in Mark's narrative. We are told that upon being healed, she began to serve the disciples. Poor woman, just recovered from a fever and she has to get up and make supper for a bunch of men? The Greek verb "to serve" is *diakinein* from which we get our word *deacon* and it means much more than making supper – it means giving comfort and aid and guidance. It appears three times in Mark's gospel – here with Peter's mother in law and in 10:45 when Jesus says he came not to be served but to serve others – meaning giving life and help and hope and healing. *Diakinein* also appears in 15:41, "In Galilee these women followed him and *diakined*. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there." From Peter's mother in law to the women at the cross, women have been *diakonizing* as faithful disciples beside Jesus from the beginning.

By sundown the whole town of Capernum gathers at Peter's door for healing. These are those who are outside the house – not family members and outside the synagogue – not believers but waiting at the door nonetheless for healing. This is a whole new layer of sickness from synagogue sickness to home sickness to societal sickness. Jesus' healing means restoration on every level in synagogue and home and town.

In the midst of this healing activity, very early in the morning, while it was still dark Mark says – which foreshadows what other important thing that happened very early in the morning while it was still dark?

Resurrection – Jesus moves and prays and meets God very early in the morning while it was still dark. There he finds his own source of healing and renewal and direction. Into this intimate prayerful space bursts Simon and his companions exclaiming, “everyone is looking for you.” Jesus replied, Let us go somewhere else to the nearby villages so I can preach there also. That is why I have come. So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Jesus work is much more than physical healing. It restores members to each other in religious communities. It restores families to each other and it restores people to their neighbourhoods and towns. This is a multi-layered, all encompassing healing that we will explore throughout Mark's Gospel in

the remaining weeks of Epiphany and Lent. In Mark's gospel – the focus is not on sick individuals but what they represent – the larger connections to sickness in families, churches and society. Jesus' healing begins in the synagogue – it begins in the church because that's where God knew we might need healing the most. Being church is hard work. We are trying to do the right things. We are trying to represent God but we may need new teachings sometimes. We are trying to be God's people but what a tough lot we are sometimes. So Jesus invited us to the table as he did with his disciples in Peter's house and as he did at the Last Supper – gathering the unruly lot to each other despite the betrayals and competing visions and having given thanks, he took the bread and broke it saying, This is my body broken for you – do this in remembrance of me...

Hymn of Response HWB #528 I Stand Amazed in the Presence.