

It's the Sabbath day, and Jesus has been teaching in the synagogue—and as it turns out there was a man there who was possessed by an unclean spirit. And Jesus' response to this? He orders the evil spirit to come out of the man, to the absolute amazement of all present. After they leave the synagogue Jesus and four of his disciples, James and John the sons of Zebedee the fisherman, and Andrew and Simon-Peter, go to Simon and Andrew's home. As soon as they're in the door, Jesus hears that Simon's mother in law is sick in bed with a fever—so we know that she is critical. Fever means there's an infectious process happening in the body and in the days before antibiotics, fevers were often deadly. How does Jesus respond to this news? Jesus goes directly to her bedside, reaches out to her and gently grasps her hand. And then he lifts her up, the literal Greek translation is he 'raises her up'—he helps her up out of her bed. And the fever has left her. The infection is cured; Peter's mother in law is healed, saved from her deathbed by Jesus.

What an amazing and wonderful way to picture Jesus, a man for whom concern and caring are his instantaneous response. And this is his second a miracle of healing on a Sabbath day! What an image of our Lord, one that for me is so very telling of the compassion of our God to our needs. In those times a good and law-abiding Jewish man would never go to a strange woman's bedside—and then touch her! And healing on a Sabbath was not proper—good Jews didn't work on the Sabbath. All these details are noteworthy because Mark made a point to write them into his account of this healing. The social proprieties of the situation didn't matter to Jesus. What was important, was that Jesus cared and could heal, and did heal. It's also apparent that Jesus didn't proscribe to the belief of the time that sickness was a punishment from God, and that the one who was ill must be deserving of it somehow. Otherwise, he wouldn't have healed people, or cast out those demon causing illnesses either. This story tells us of Jesus' overriding compassion for those who were unwell—regardless of the cause of the ill health. And it tells us the power of Jesus' touch heals.

Next Mark tells us how the healed woman responds to her healing: "Then the fever left her and she began to serve them." (v.31b) At first reading, this irked me, with my 21st century feminist glasses on. But upon further study and reflection I realized this is not a case of "Ok, let's get the sick lady well enough so she can get out of bed and feed us." We need to look at this with an eye to the times and the situation—the fuller picture. A deathly ill woman healed is immediately and fully restored to her pre-illness health status, so much so that she is able and wants to resume her role as the woman of the household. I'm sure after being so ill, her family would have readily given her a pass to recuperate some more before being expected to take up her hostess duties, but no, she wanted to show her thanks by serving Jesus and his disciples, one of whom was also her son in law.

This tells us that she chose to serve them as a response to her healing, her way of giving thanks to the Lord for her healing, she expresses her thanks by serving others. We know because of the word Mark chose in the original Greek: *diakoneo*, which in English means 'to serve'. "This is the same verb Jesus uses to describe the essence of his own ministry later on in Mark's gospel; chapter 10 verse 45—"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve (*diakoneo*) others and give his life as a ransom for many." (NLT) *Diakoneo* is the root word from which we get the English word 'Deacon'. Peter's mother in law is known in the church as the first Deacon—the first person to serve Jesus. So unfortunate that we do not know her name! Jesus' healing restores not only her bodily health, but it would have also raised her spirits and given her a more positive sense of self, from one who is ill to one who is well. This is something anyone who has ever been ill for a long period of time understands—how good it feels when we get back on our feet and are well enough to get back to our normal lives and do the things we need and want to do! We are grateful for our renewed health and the ability to be our full selves again. In the case of Peter's mother in law, the healing provided her with the ability to take her proper role in the household, regaining her respect as a valued member of the family, and the community.

Jesus freed Peter's mother in law from her illness, restoring her "for a life of purpose, meaning and good works. Yes, good works, not those things that we do in the vain hope of justifying ourselves before God or others, but rather those things that we do as a response to the Gospel to service our neighbour stemming from a sense of joy, love and freedom."¹

Our Lord is compassionate and caring, understanding of our individual human needs, each in our own circumstances. Jesus gets it, he knows our situations. Our compassionate and caring Lord wants nothing more than for us to be fully whole, to be fully in sync with the love of God as the guiding force for our lives. Jesus came to earth to teach us that, to bring us back to God's ways for us. Jesus came to minister, to serve--*diakoneo*. Christ's healing touch can lift us, free us from the restrictions that prevent us from being as complete and well as we can be, so we too can take our God given place, and our God given roles of service to bring about God's kingdom. Like Jesus did.

It's the touch of Jesus, the presence of Holy Spirit that fills us. It's the grace of God our creator that completes us, and makes us whole. Amen

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¹ David Lose in www.davidlose.net/2015/02/epiphany-5-b-freedom-for/ accessed Feb. 16.17