

O holy one, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts meet with your gracious approval, my strength, my rock, and our example of the true and holy servant. Amen.

Our story from Mark today continues on the sabbath with Jesus leaving the synagogue after healing a man with an unclean spirit. He enters the home of Simon and Andrew, along with James and John. Today we see the sacred work of God's Kingdom happening in an everyday location that we all know very well. Our own homes. Jesus' work, his ministry moves beyond the walls in the synagog forward in the everyday lives of the everyday people.

I brought up a couple weeks ago that sometimes the lives of the disciples seem so different from ours and that this kind of thinking allows us to be spectators and prevents our actual learning of how to follow for ourselves. But we know that like us they too, have jobs. They're fishermen. While they are taught and follow Jesus we hear from many stories in our gospels that take place on the water, or in the boat, that they are continuing to fish. Today we hear they have families. How often do we think of Peter being married. In 1st Corinthians, we read that Simon Peter's wife accompanies him on his journeys after Jesus's resurrection and ascension. As Paul notes, "Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?" Clearly, Simon's mother-in-law has had a profound influence on the faith of her daughter and her extended family, and hopefully it will for us today.

Mark's Gospel tells us that as soon as Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law, she "begins to serve." When we hear these words we might vision a poor woman leaping out of bed to serve the men of the house so typical in a sexist world. But the verb St. Mark uses to describe the mother-in-law's service is the same verb the gospels use to describe the angels who attend Jesus after his forty days in the wilderness. It is the same verb Jesus uses to describe himself when he washes his disciples' feet. And it is the same verb the early church uses to commission deacons, the "servant" leaders of the church. What if Simon's mother-in-law is not an undervalued woman in a patriarchal system, but the church's first deacon? The first person Jesus liberates and commissions into service for God? Simon's mother-in-law, recognizes that she isn't only freed from something, she is also freed for something, to respond to the world in which she lives.

In healing her, Jesus frees her and invites her for service, to pursue her calling long before even her son-in-law and his friends do.

What if you and I are to imagine that each time we respond to needs of the people and the world around us that we are responding to God's call? Each and every time. Where else would we look to trace the actions of the God who "sits above the circles of the earth...and stretches out the heavens like a curtain"? But by looking to the everyday acts of service, care, and sacrifice we see all around us. Which means, that our seemingly ordinary lives can and do become at any given moment the arena for the activity of the Holy One of Israel as God continues to love and bless the world... through us!

In our first reading today Isaiah cries out, "Have you not seen? Have you not heard? The Lord God almighty is at work in you, with you, and through you, to care for the people and all of the world God loves so much." This is not just information but a promise that God is and does continue to work through all of us.

And as we are invited to serve, we are also invited to free others for the service of God. We're invited to pay attention, to notice, and to bless the gifts and abilities of all those around us. He comes to lift up you and me, so that we might also be called and inspired with compassion to lift up each other.

Before Mark's first chapter is up, Jesus has taught with authority, exorcized an unclean spirit, and healed a woman who was near death. News is spreading to an occupied people of the one who can help them catch their breath, who can reacquaint them with their humanity, one whom even the demons obey. It is no wonder then that everyone is searching for him.

Jesus takes the time to renew his strength as he goes off by himself to pray, to listen to the voice of his father/mother. What does he hear? What do you hear, when you take the time to listen to the voice of God?

Thomas Merton says: "We have to remember that we look for solitude in order to grow here in love for God and in love for others. We do not go into the desert to escape people, but to learn how to find them: we do not leave them in order to have nothing more to do with them, but to find out the way to do them the most good. It is in solitude that illusions finally dissolve.

He who is truly alone finds in himself the heart of compassion with which to love not only this man or woman, but all men and all women.”

And from Isaiah: Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. Have you ever been told that you're doing too much, that you need to cool it or you'll burn yourself out. But that message doesn't make any sense to you because what you feel when you're praying, or contemplating, is new life, you feel yourself being constantly fed, renewing your strength, your soul, your life.

In this fast paced ministry of proclaiming and healing, words and actions, Jesus says simply: “this is what I came to do.”

He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up.

She doesn't get raised up so that she can sit and rest...In our world you go from being a servant to having others serve you. If you work hard- you get to rest. In fact, we get to a place, finally, where people can come and do things for us. After all 'we have earned it,' we say, and we have 'paid our dues. But here is the kicker, when we are really touched by Jesus- and have allowed Jesus to come near and make us whole, the system is reversed- we are elevated... we are raised and lifted up to our highest calling.. to serve others to the end of our days in this the kingdom of God. What if our world operated on the principle of service to all God's ongoing creation?

Searching for a vessel the author is unknown.

The Master was searching for a vessel to use;
On the shelf there were many—which one would He choose?
Take me, cried the gold one, I'm shiny and bright,
I'm of great value and I do things just right.
My beauty and luster will outshine the rest
And for someone like You, Master, gold would be the best!

Unheeding, the Master passed on to the brass,
It was wide mouthed and shallow, and polished like glass.
Here! Here! cried the vessel, I know I will do,
Place me on Your table for all men to view.

Look at me, called the goblet of crystal so clear,
My transparency shows my contents so dear,
Though fragile am I, I will serve You with pride,
And I'm sure I'll be happy Your house to abide.

The Master came next to a vessel of wood,
Polished and carved, it solidly stood.
You may use me, dear Master, the wooden bowl said,
But I'd rather You used me for fruit, not for bread!

Then the Master looked down and saw a vessel of clay.
Empty and broken it helplessly lay.
No hope had the vessel that the Master might choose,
To cleanse and make whole, to fill and to use.
Ah! This is the vessel I've been hoping to find,
I will mend and use it and make it all Mine.

I need not the vessel with pride of itself;
Nor the one who is narrow to sit on the shelf;
Nor the one who is big-mouthed and shallow and loud;
Nor one who displays his contents so proud;
Not the one who thinks he can do all things just right;
But this plain earthy vessel filled with My power and might.

Then gently He lifted the vessel of clay.
Mended and cleansed it and filled it that day.
Spoke to it kindly. "There's work you must do,
Just pour out to others as I pour into you." Amen.