



raised to new life

April 11, 2021 | Mark 1:29-34

RAISED TO NEW LIFE

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Well, Easter is over, for another year. Although all our celebrations have been humble this past year, after an important milestone event– like Easter – there's still a kind of rebound effect afterwards. All the anticipation is over and done with, the celebration celebrated; the decorations and flowers may linger for a time, but for all intents and purposes, the big, amazing moment is in the past.

So now what? Easter and all that it means – Christ's resurrection and the good news that it shouts to creation – what do we do with that incredible event and the good news it delivers? How do we live that new life in Christ, right here, right now?

Our Scripture reading this morning is from the gospel of Mark. Unlike the Easter story we read last week from the gospel of John, Mark kind of screeches to a halt on Easter morning. There's nothing much after the resurrection; just a few abrupt verses about Jesus meeting up with his disciples. So in Mark, Mary showed up at the tomb on Easter morning, she had a conversation with an angel about how Jesus is not in the tomb because he is risen, and that's it. Nothing else; event over; celebration celebrated, sort of. And that's why, for this post-Easter, post-resurrection Sunday, we're back at the beginning of Mark, investigating what it meant, in Mark's gospel, that Jesus is risen.

Jesus and his followers go from the synagogue to Simon-Peter's family home, where they tell Jesus that one of the family, Simon's wife's mother, is very sick with a fever. In the gospel of Mark, sickness has both a physical and symbolic meaning; people are genuinely sick with real illnesses, but being sick also symbolises the impact that sin has had on humanity and on all creation. Jesus' miracle is quietly and simply done: he takes her hand and raises her up.

The Bible was, of course, not originally written in English but in Greek, and even that's not the language Jesus and his friends spoke. But this "raised up" that Jesus does for Simon's mother-in-law is the same ancient Greek word that is used to proclaim Christ's resurrection – that joyful "he is risen" – in Mark 16:6. And it's the same raised up that's used in five other healing stories in Mark. This raising up of Simon's mother-in-law is foreshadowing, it's hinting at the resurrection of Christ and through Christ, all believers. This first physical

healing represents a fundamental part of Jesus' ministry; it's a small, but visible and undeniable sign of the kingdom of God coming into the world, like small pebbles tumbling down a hill before an avalanche.

Simon's mother-in-law is raised up, restored to health and wholeness, and she begins to serve them. This might seem like an offhand note about an ordinary woman, included for a bit of historical colour. But it's not – it's actually a really important story. If it wasn't, then Mark wouldn't have included it in his gospel; Mark's gospel is the oldest and shortest one, and he always sticks to the bare facts. It's important because Simon's mother-in-law is one of the first people to be restored by Jesus to wholeness and wellness, one of the first to experience a taste of the new life to which we will all be raised when God's kingdom is fully and finally here.

And after being healed, she begins to serve. This particular way of saying "to serve" – the same word is used to describe the angels waiting on Jesus after he resisted temptation in the wilderness. When Jesus declares that he has come among us to serve, it's the same word. Simon's mother-in-law may indeed have made them a meal, and was able to offer hospitality to Jesus, his disciples and her family. But the word chosen – this special way to say "serve" – signals to us that there is more here than a simple meal. It tells us that she is responding to Jesus, to who he is and what he has done. Simon's mother-in-law does not serve them a meal because she has to, because she is compelled to, because someone asks her to, because that's what women do in the home.

She serves because this is what discipleship looks like. She serves, showing us what following Jesus will really mean. She does not serve out of gratitude alone. She is not just an example of how you need to thank Jesus when he does something nice for you. This healing, this restoration, tells a different story, one that is hard to see beneath the excitement of Jesus' miraculous healing. This different story is difficult to see because it's hard to believe that a simple healing story could actually be a call story, a discipleship story. But that is exactly what this story of Simon's mother-in-law is.

Jesus' restoration of those he meets, those he heals and saves, is most often talked about as though it only demonstrates that Jesus is God. Yet, Jesus doesn't heal just to heal, just to prove himself, or just to confirm God's power. Jesus heals because if Jesus is who he says he is and really came to earth to live among us, then the Kingdom of God is already making inroads into our world – and we are a part of that kingdom, we have a role in it, and Jesus has work for us to do for him.

And as it turns out, and what Simon's mother-in-law reveals, is that this role, this work, looks an awful lot like how Jesus himself will describe his own ministry, his own power, and his own presence: "For even the Son of Man," Jesus says, "did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people." (Mark 10:45).

We see those "many" have already come seeking Jesus: "When it was evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered by the door"

The whole town – Capernaum was not as big as Sarnia; with perhaps only 1500 residents, we'd call Capernaum a small town or village. But, like Sarnia and Point Edward, it was a community on the water, with docks and ports and ships. Try to imagine what it would look like for an entire community's worth of people to be gathered at the door of one house. Picture a sea of faces, men, women and children of all ages; families and couples clustered together, others standing alone. The street filled, sidewalk to sidewalk, as far as the eye can see...imagine the enormity of suffering that gathering represents. This humble, private miracle of healing Simon's mother-in-law is extended into the public sphere to the crowds of people who need Jesus and his ministry that heals, that restores what's been broken by sin and raises each one of us to new life in him: free from sin, and free to serve.

Simon's mother-in-law has no name that we know of, and she didn't perform any historically-important deeds. As far as we know, she didn't go on any church-planting journeys like Paul, or preach a great sermon at Pentecost like Simon Peter. Christ simply called her by healing her, by restoring her, and her discipleship was expressed in simple, straight-forward ways: serving Jesus and serving others. This sounds like a very doable and practical sort of discipleship, doesn't it?

In Capernaum, on this long-ago day early in Jesus' ministry, all those who were in need of help, of healing, of freedom from sin and brokenness and suffering, they all gathered round the door of the house Jesus was in. And it was the whole town.

It'd be exactly the same today in any city or town or village, if you told them there was someone who could restore and renew and make whole their very beings. Everyone needs what Jesus offers. But so many people don't know how to share or recognise that need for wholeness.

But we do: it's the good news. And the good news is just this: though all of creation and all who live in it and everything that happens in it are broken and damaged by sin, it is possible for us to be saved from this broken, hopeless state, because of Jesus and what he did on the Cross: taking on the burden of all sin and raising us and all creation up to new life with him.

We are living in exciting times, because we live between the event that just happened – the resurrection of Christ – and the event that is going to happen soon, when he comes back again to finish the job. We know that the world is going to change and the knowledge of that is enough to make the world start to be a different place now. Sometimes, I think, we tend to put limits on the good news; we impose our own expectations on what it should look like or what affect it can have on us and the rest of the world. We may view the good news as an option, as a piece of advice for better living. Some might think it's the ultimate in retirement planning, or hope for a better, happier existence in heaven after we die. And, to some extent, the good news is about all of these things. But more than this, the good news is about how the one true God is changing the world forever. God entered personally into the world by sending his Son, Jesus. And God comes to the world now in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit wherever the good news is lived and spoken by faithful, active Christ-followers. And finally, one day, God will come back to finish the work already begun, to fill the world with his glory and love, to transform everything, to set everything right, and to heal everything with his powerful love.

As followers of Jesus we know that Easter means that something miraculous has happened, and something even more extraordinary will happen. And in between, right now, something powerful and mysterious is happening in the lives of all those who are caught up in God's good news, who have been raised to new life by Christ.

Easter is passed for another year, and we recognise anew that we have been raised to new life. Now, we are tasked with living our new, resurrection life right now, in the time between. And we do that by serving: by being Christ's eyes, his ears, his hands and his compassionate heart. We live that new life by serving others, in Jesus' name. And it's not hard or too large-scale a task or beyond our ability at all. We can fill hungry bellies and put dry socks on cold feet, give dignity back to the abused, plant gardens and reduce, reuse and recycle, and pray loving words for hurting minds and bodies. We can let the grace and blessing God has poured into our lives overflow into the lives of others.

And when we do these things from a place of hope and faith, we are sharing the good news that Jesus began proclaiming on that day in Capernaum; the good news Jesus made final and real and powerful for us on Easter; we carry on with Jesus' work, nudging little pieces of creation closer to being healed, closer to wholeness, and to the new life of God's kingdom. Thanks be to God! Amen.