

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Healing the Illness that Keeps Us from Serving

Mark 1:29-39

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Analysis by Ronald C. Neustadt

29As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

35In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." 38He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." 39And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

DIAGNOSIS: Hesitant to Serve

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Staying Put*

Simon's mother-in-law and all those other sick and demon-possessed folks they brought to Jesus "that evening" (i.e. after the Sabbath had ended) were not the only ones who had a problem: Notice "Simon and his companions," who hunted Jesus down when the locals were searching for him.

Simon and his companions seemed to expect Jesus to stick around to enjoy his popularity (or take care of any other necessary healings so they wouldn't have to be bothered). Didn't they understand that what Jesus had "come out to do" was not to receive adulation, but to proclaim a message—and that he had called them to "follow him" (1:16-20) so that they could proclaim that message, too?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Afraid to Follow*

Mark doesn't tell us explicitly in this pericope why those disciples were hesitant to "go on to the neighboring towns," but we don't have to read far to find out why. Again and again, those disciples hesitate (and sometimes even rebuke Jesus for proceeding – cf. 8:33) because they themselves don't trust the message he is proclaiming. That shouldn't surprise us. Isn't that what often keeps us from proclaiming the message, too? Rather than announce God's new regime (managing by mercy) we instead often keep quiet. To do otherwise is too risky, we conclude. It's a way of thinking that indicates how little we trust his message.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Left to Ourselves*

Worst of all, when we fail to trust the good news of the forgiveness of sins (which is the source of healing, cf. 2:5) and when we fail to bring that good news to others as a result

of our lack of trust, it's not only the others who miss out. So do we. So says God (cf. 3:28 ff.). If we insist on staying put and keeping to ourselves we end up getting left to ourselves. If we don't trust the message he brings (and that he is), we don't have him. All we have is ourselves. It's a hell of a way to live.

PROGNOSIS: Emboldened by Christ

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Coming Out to the Left out Ones*

But look at Who ends up spending his entire life "coming out" to all those who have been left out – even when we have been left out as a result of our own choices, our own lack of trust. No matter what it takes, he comes out to us, offering forgiveness and healing. He searches for us and he enters our "very dark" and "deserted" places (v. 35), even when it takes him to a cross and tomb. He comes to us, even there, to "proclaim the message": The reign of God has come near; turn around and trust the good news (v. 15).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Afraid to Follow? No Longer!*

It's true. Mark tells us that when some other followers went to the tomb "very early" that morning and were told that Jesus wasn't there but had "gone ahead" to Galilee, "they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid." But history tells us that changed – just as it does with us when God gets the message through to us of how dear we are to God on account of Jesus, and we get healed and exorcized ourselves. We find ourselves trusting, as Jesus keeps forgiving us and inviting us to go with him to "neighboring towns" (read: everyone around us) to proclaim the message of God's gracious way of operating.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Can't Keep It to Ourselves*

In fact, when we trust Jesus' Promise, we find ourselves unable to keep it to ourselves. The young man in the tomb instructed the women to tell Peter and the others that Jesus was going ahead of them to Galilee (the site of all those healings and exorcisms and all that forgiving), and they would find him there. That's where we find ourselves, too, when we trust his Promise—in service to others, just like Peter's mother-in-law, who was the first to make the connection. Once we know who the Lord of healing is, and how far he has come to heal us, we too can go out of our way, in service—even into some very dark and lonely places.