

5th Sunday After Epiphany
Isaiah 40:21-31
1 Corinthians 9:16-23

February 7, 2021
Psalm 147: 1-12, 21c
Mark 1:29-39

Treated as a Person

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Let us begin by hearing the voice of Mary Magdalene.

Seven demons possessed my soul
Seven Marys lived inside of me
One Mary was chaste, another carnal,
A Mary elated, a Mary tormented,
A frightened Mary, a lone one,
And one that hated God.

I stood on the hill throughout the day.
Watching the procession to Golgotha
Seeing the crosses set in the ground.

I heard from afar the words that he said,
He pardoned the thief at his side,
Begged for a sip of water.

I came to the garden alone to mourn the death of Jesus.
I wanted to sit by the tomb,
I felt a special sorrow
For the one who had healed
My troubled soul,
Who had treated me
As a person.

We are almost at the end of these Sundays
That follow the Feast of the Epiphany.

More than likely everyone has put their wisemen away by now.
Those wisemen followed a star...
God was manifested to them, shown to them, revealed to them
By an awesome light shining in the night sky.
They looked up for guidance.

Mary looked face to face -
Face to face with Jesus -
Face to face with God
Though she did not yet know that as she came to the garden.

Nor did the disciples and followers packed into Simon's house
 Know that, not yet,
 As they too were face to face with Jesus
 Hearing him, touching him, seeing, smelling him even.

And speaking of face to face encounters,
 How astounded Simon's mother-in-law must have been that day,
 Lying in bed ill with a fever.

It doesn't sound like she was near death or in crisis.
 But, darn, she was too sick to get up and offer hospitality
 To the men who have come to the house
 With Simon and Andrew.

How surprising that they bring the man called Jesus to her bedside.
How surprising that he took her hand and guided her to stand up.
How surprising that the fever is gone...
Everything is back to normal or is it????

For at sundown, here comes the whole city gathered around the door
 Clamoring for healing from this man called Jesus.
 Clamoring to be touched and made whole.

Healing stories abound in our scriptures.
 We're familiar with the healing stories of Jesus.
 As he healed by word, by touch, even from a distance.

But Jesus did not heal everyone
 In Galilee of their ailments
 Did he?

What about those who may not have able to get
 Close to the door of the house?
What about those searching for Jesus early the next morning
 Only to discover that he had left.
Can you imagine their disappointment and maybe even despair.

If their expectations were that everyone needing healing
 Would be healed,
 They were sorely disappointed.

Why was I left out?
 What's wrong with me?
 Aren't I just as deserving as those others?
Simon's mother-in-law only had a fever.
 My illness is more serious than that.

Healing stories often raise similar questions in us.

I've known a few people who have experienced
Unexplainable healing and you may also.
I remember Zeke from the congregation in Winslow AZ
Where our young family worshipped.
Zeke was diagnosed with a malignant tumor in his thumb
And he brought that concern to our healing service,
At which, of course, we prayed for and with him.
When he went to the doctor the next week
To have his scheduled surgery,
The tumor was gone!!!!

Hooray and Alleluia!

But again, what about those of us and our friends and family members
who don't experience that kind of miraculous healing?
Is something wrong with us, with them,
In the way we prayed
In the strength of our faith?

Often our first response is,
like I'm sure those of Jesus' time was:
But, But, But....
what about? How come? Why not?

Faith IS mentioned in some of the Jesus healing stories, but not all.
The people surrounding the door that day...
They did not yet have the kind of faith
We talk about,
Faith in Jesus as the crucified and resurrected Son of God,
As Emmanuel, God with us.

No, they came simply because the news
Was spreading like wildfire.
We have a healer in our midst!

Healing was important to Jesus.
He was a healer, as were some others in his day.
But healing and casting out demons
were not the primary focus of his ministry.

What was Jesus' reply
When Simon and his companions found him
Early that morning after having to hunt for him?
Jesus were told, had been praying.
And even after hearing, "Everyone is searching for you."
He 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.”

And we are told:

“And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.”

Proclaiming the message
THE message
Proclaiming the message.

And what is THE MESSAGE?
“The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent and believe in this Good news.”
The Kingdom of God is at hand.

Emmanuel, God with us.
Jesus proclaims the message.
Jesus is the message.
The manifestation of God right before their eyes;
God in the world;
Touching, speaking, healing, forgiving,
restoring the lives of individual people
And ultimately showing them a new way of being with each other,
The way of love, peace, compassion, justice, as God intended from the beginning of time.

And God before our eyes also.
But darn it, not in so direct a way as face to face.

Jesus’s healings were a beginning,
The beginning of demonstrating to the people
Who God is and wants to be for them;
Not just in words,
But in actions.

Essentially saying:
My actions are signs of God in the world;
in the flesh, face to face.
God sees you, God touches you, God cares for you, God loves you
God can bring you to health and wholeness.

The power of God is with me
Incarnate in the world.
At hand, right before your eyes.

This was and still is God's power manifested in God's son
To restore the fallen world to the
At-one-ness with the Creator
With which it had begun.

Not to restore to perfect health.
But to restore our relation to God,
Our at-one-ness, our trust and our faith
For ever and always acknowledging our humanness.
God is God.
We are the beloved of God.

Our prayers for healing are an acknowledgement of that relationship
And a practice of that trust and faith:

Acknowledging silently or out loud and sometimes to another or a group
As we do each Sunday
That YES,
We believe that God's grace is working among us
God is with us in our times of need.
God's love is near.

And at times when life is dark and uncertain
Confusing and full of doubt and despair,
Those prayers are what I call a practice;
Practicing our faith, going through the motions,
Hanging on as best we can.

Then we too, become sacraments, as Mary Magdalene did;
Outward and visible signs
Of the inward and invisible Grace of God.
Face to face with the world around us,
We make visible, make real
The message of Jesus.

I came to the garden alone
To mourn the death of Jesus.
I wanted to sit by the tomb,
I felt a special sorrow
For the one who had healed
My troubled soul,
Who had treated me
As a person.

Mary was treated as a person by Jesus
A person whom God desired to restore to God's self.
God was with her.

This is the promise we can hold on to also for ourselves and for the world.

This is the promise—the good news we can live and proclaim:

The kingdom of God is at hand.

God is with us.