



Westminster Presbyterian Church  
Eugene, Oregon  
“At Home” Worship  
February 7, 2021

*Leading in Worship Today:*  
*Ursula Damgaard, Director of Music*  
*The Rev. Marta Z. Ukropina*  
*Liturgist: Bryan Wickman*  
*Vocalists: Steve and Jeanie Halberg*

*Gathering Around God’s Word*

Call to Worship

from Isaiah 40

Have we not known? Have we not heard?  
**Has it not been told to us since the beginning?**  
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.**

Opening Hymn

Come Sing, O Church, in Joy!

#305

Call to Confession

We fool ourselves if we think that our ways are  
hidden from God. Therefore let us confess our sin,  
trusting in the mercy of God our maker.

## Prayer of Confession

**God, you are everlasting, the creator of all that is. Your understanding is beyond measure. We confess to you that we have sinned against you and our neighbors. In your compassion, forgive us, for we place our hope in your steadfast love. Amen.**

## Assurance of Pardon

**Praise the Lord! Our God heals the brokenhearted and binds up our wounds. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.**

## *The Word*

## Prayer for Illumination

**Holy God, speak to us what has been told from the beginning, your Word that is the foundation of the world. Amen.**

## Scripture Readings

*Old Testament Reading: Psalm 147:1-11, 20c*

**Praise the Lord! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.**

**The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel.**

**He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.**

**He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names.**

**Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.**

**The Lord lifts up the downtrodden; he casts the wicked to the ground.**

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre.

He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, makes grass grow on the hills.

He gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry.

His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;

but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

Praise the Lord!

*New Testament Reading: Mark 1:29-39*

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

That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And 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. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "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 he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

**Anthem**

*Are We Like Sheep*

**Sermon**

**“*Serving*”**

**The Rev. Marta Z Ukropina**

Our reading from Mark continues on from what David preached upon last week which described Jesus’ first healing miracle: a casting out of an unclean spirit. Many would call it Jesus’ first exorcism. The Gospel of Mark is known for its fast paced narrative, using words like immediately and at once. So here we are with a text that begins with “as soon as.” There is no rest for the weary. Mark keeps the reader on their toes moving quickly between places and events. There is barely time to digest the magnitude of the story which is perhaps why those who put the lectionary readings together split readings like this one apart. Taken in smaller pieces, there is more time to reflect and digest the story as both smaller segments and as a whole.

So “as soon as” they left the synagogue, we find Jesus’ next miracle which is also a healing, but of a different kind. This one is more intimate as it is the healing of a disciple’s relative. Simon’s mother-in-law had been in bed with a fever and the disciples told Jesus about it “at once.”

This text has so many elements to it which make it a great preaching text, but there are a few stumbling blocks one must overcome before fully delving into some of the rich, deep meanings. For one, as a woman of faith and more specifically as a female minister, I am no stranger to Biblical texts being interpreted as a way to push a particular agenda. Using the Bible in this way is proof texting at its finest and it is NOT a responsible way to interpret scripture.

How many times has someone quoted scripture to me as a way to let me know that women are not to be ministers? Or at the very least, if you are a female minister, surely you are only preaching to women and children. These comments seek to negate a woman's call to ministry. Or for how long has the church used texts like this one to define and perpetuate outdated gender roles? One of the news stories brought to light during this tumultuous year has been the further divide between what you might call progressive and conservative Christians and much of that is centered on our interpretation of scripture including but not limited to gender discrimination. We mainline Protestants like to think that we wrestled with the gender issue in the past, but it is still very much alive and kicking and we need to keep teaching and living lives of inclusivity and acceptance.

The verse I am talking about of course is vs 31. Jesus comes to the house and heals Simon's mother-in-law, who we do not even get the pleasure of knowing her name. But, I digress. We can assume that she has been very ill since she is lying in bed and Simon felt the need to ask Jesus to come and heal her. And what does she do right after she is healed? She goes to work and serves which many imply means she serves the men.

Or does she?

One interpretation of course is to read the text as it is—she served them. That interpretation however is simplistic and in my opinion is used to only to further perpetuate stereotypical gender roles with women existing to serve and take care of the men. It is what people in more conservative circles may refer to as complementarianism —or the belief that men and women

have different, but complementary roles in marriage, family life and religious leadership. This is the line of thought that allows a woman to be a “minister” to women and children, but not a minister that preaches from the pulpit to everyone. A complementarian view of this text would see that the male disciples had the role of healing and teaching and the women had the role of serving and tending to the men so they could be successful in their roles. I and others will argue that there is more to this text than that.

What if reading this as “she served them” and taking that to mean she served the men is missing the point completely? What if it really is all about the healing and the *response* to the healing? She is healed and then she serves as a response to the healing. The Greek word used here is diakoneō which is the word from which our office of Deacon is derived. One commentator wrote that Simon’s mother-in-law was the first Deacon. This translation of serving calls to mind Mark’s words about Jesus in chapter 10: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” In being healed, Simon’s mother-in-law realized that as a disciple of Christ she, too, was to serve others and care for them. In a way, her healing was also a call story. She experienced the Good News of Christ first hand, through her healing.

In experiencing the Good News, Jesus is calling all of us into ministry with him. And what is our response to the Good News? Do we digest it and keep it for ourselves or does it push us to service, to action, to caring for other? Later in our text, we read that Simon and his companions hunted for Jesus when the crowd became great with need. They pleaded with him to come back and do more. But what if they had been more like his

**mother-in-law? What if they had looked at the crowd and instead of running off to find Jesus, they found ways they, too, could serve the crowd? That is, after all, what Jesus is calling all of us to do.**

**Let's go back to the actual healing for a moment. What in that healing propelled Simon's mother-in-law to active discipleship and service? Sure, being cured of a debilitating fever would give anyone cause for joy and celebration, but it might not necessarily push one to service. The act of healing and the way in which Jesus healed is what compelled her to service.**

**"He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up." This was a personal act, filled with compassion and caring. "He took her by the hand"—the power of touch restored her and healed her. "He lifted her up"—it was a resurrection moment—a new life of restored health had begun—an old life of sickness and suffering was left behind. Her healing not only restored her but it transformed her into a disciple who wanted to serve and spread the Good News.**

**We all know about the power of touch. As humans, we have a basic need for nearness and relationship with others. Research has shown that babies who are not touched or held do not develop in the same way as those who do. And in fact, there can be devastating effects both physically and mentally. This year has shined light on that as the pandemic has caused so many people to be isolated and away from their loved ones. There have been many stories about people just wanting, needing, to be able to hug or touch their loved ones. I have even read stories about people creating hug shields made up of layers of plastic so that grandparents could come and hug their grandchildren safely.**

You may have heard of the ICU Grandpa, David Deutchman, who volunteered 2 times a week for 14 years holding thousands of NICU and PICU babies at Children's Hospital in Atlanta. He died this past fall after a short fight with stage IV cancer and his story made national and international news. He is one of many volunteers throughout our world who gives their time to hold the most vulnerable in our midst. Cradling babies has been shown to improve their health and families cannot always be there to hold them. Deutchman's care went beyond babies—he also held children's hands when they were in the hospital. A simple Google search will pull up dozens of images of him holding babies. When I see pictures of Deutchman cradling such small, vulnerable infants, it reminds me of Christ holding and healing all of us. There is one picture of him holding a sign that says: "There is Healing Power in Being Held." His was a ministry of presence, service and love for thousands of families and children.

And that reminded me of our healing miracle today. There was power and healing in Jesus' touch. Not only did Jesus' touch heal Simon's mother-in-law, but it also gave her the power to serve and perhaps heal others. Healing isn't necessarily synonymous with curing—as in curing a fever. Healing can take on so many different forms. Offering someone hospitality and just listening to them can be an act of healing. It can heal relationship, heal wounds, heal feelings, heal hearts. The act of service can be an act of healing.

All of these are transformative and powerful. All of these speak to God's Kingdom. Jesus went around performing miracles—not to bolster his status or make him a celebrity. But instead, he performed miracles to



point people to the love we have been given by God. He healed, touched and restored to welcome people into a community of faith and acceptance. His miracles point us to God and reveal God's calling on all of our lives. A call to diakoneō. It is not a call to be served, but is a call to serve. It is a call to a life that touches others, that raises others up and that offers hospitality.

When we are touched by Christ, we are healed and transformed. And our response to that should be like Simon's mother-in-law. It should push us to service—to proclaiming the Good News that has been given to all of us. We are part of the Kingdom of God and Jesus has called all of us to service within and for that Kingdom. May we all go about our daily lives as servants to our hurting world. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

### *Responding to God's Word*

#### **Affirmation of Faith**

#### **From A Brief Statement of Faith**

We trust in Jesus Christ, fully human, fully God. Jesus proclaimed the reign of God: preaching good news to the poor and release to the captives, teaching by word and deed and blessing the children, healing the sick and binding up the brokenhearted, eating with outcasts, forgiving sinners, and calling all to repent and believe the gospel. Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition, Jesus was crucified, suffering the depths of human pain and giving his life for the sins of the world. God raised this Jesus from the dead, vindicating his sinless life, breaking the power of sin and evil, delivering us from death to life eternal.

#### **Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer**

God of the universe, you sit above the circle of the earth, and so we pray for the oceans and mountains, inland water and the air we breathe. Save and protect them, we pray.

Since the beginning of our faith, we have looked to you to gather the outcasts, heal the brokenhearted and bind up their wounds. So we pray for the poor of the world, the sick and the lonely especially those on our hearts today:

How good it is to sing praises to you, O God. We pray for your church, here and around the world. Empower us to go from town to town, proclaiming the message of Christ.

Everlasting God, Creator of the ends of the earth, we bless you, for you are gracious. Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor are yours now and forever. We pray all this through Christ, who taught us to pray:

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

### *Sending of God's Word*

Closing Hymn:      *God of Our Life*      #686

### **Benediction**

May the Spirit of Jesus take your hand and lift you up so that you may be of service to others. Go in peace. Amen.