

“Finding Jesus”

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Mark 1:29-39 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. **30** Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. **31** He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. **33** And the whole city was gathered around the door. **34** 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.

35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. **36** And Simon and his companions hunted for him. **37** When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” **38** 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.” **39** And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

FINDING DORY

Several weeks ago I kept my two and a half year old grandson for several days.

And one day we watched a feature length cartoon, Finding Dory... the sequel to Finding Nemo.

For those of you who don’t watch cartoon movies, both of those movies were about lost fish trying to get home to their parents.

Those Disney fish,
they just keep getting lost.

The folks that make those cartoons are really good at understanding what children fear.

They're afraid of
...not being able to remember the way back home.
...and being all alone in the world.

SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD

Come to think of it.
We, in our own way, have that same fear...

And the same was true of the people that Jesus helped long ago.

Looking at the harassed and helpless crowd one day,
Jesus sighed and said,

"They're just like sheep without a shepherd."
(Matthew 9:36; Mark 6:34)

Today's lesson is about people who feel like sheep without a shepherd.
And in Jesus the people find the shepherd they need.

Broken people made whole again.
The lost find a way back home.

When they find Jesus, they find salvation.
And they discover an opportunity to serve as his disciple.

HEALED TO SERVE

In the first scene, Jesus visits the home of Simon and Andrew
... along with James and John.

And no sooner than they get in the door,
they quickly find Jesus.
There's a pressing need.
Peter's mother in law is in bed with a fever.

Jesus is quick to respond.

He took her hand.
He lifted her up.

And the fever left her.

In fact Simon's mother in law feels so good that
she gets up off her sick bed and cooks supper.
She serves them

Jill Duffield, the editor of the Presbyterian Outlook,
suggests that we might call this section,
"Healed to Serve".

We could stop right here and have a pretty good sermon.

But wait there's more!
The healing of Simon's mother and law is not the end of the story.

It's just the beginning.

BANGING ON THE DOOR FOR HEALING

After the healing,
Jesus and the disciples don't have time to linger over supper.

In scene two...
the word about Jesus' healing power gets out...
and as the sun goes down...
...the whole city is gathered around the door of the home.

Jill suggest we label this second section,
"Banging on the Door for Healing"

That's a pretty good title.
The people did just that.

Seems everyone had someone in the family who needed Jesus...
Some were sick.
Some were possessed with demons.

It was overwhelming.

Have you ever been a crowded doctor's office
and everyone is coughing and sad?

It was something like that
...only a whole lot more people.
And no one had an appointment!

The crowd presses in close.
And Jesus goes to work.

He cures people of various diseases.
The Great Physician is not a specialist.
He treats them all.

And the dramatic scene we witnessed in the synagogue last week
... is repeated over and over and over.

Jesus delivers those who are possessed by demons.

The demons know who Jesus is.
But, Jesus won't let them speak.

Jesus just casts them out.

The whole town gets to see the power and authority of Jesus, over and
over and over again.

People healed.
Demons sent packing.

DARK AND DESERTED

With all those people to heal
and all those demons to cast out,
it was probably getting pretty late when they finished.

In fact, I wonder if Jesus even went to bed at all.

And that brings us to the third scene in our lesson.
In this section the setting changes.

The Scripture tells us that Jesus retreated to the desert to pray.

It was morning, but it was still dark.

Jill suggests calling this section,
“Dark and Deserted.”

Surely healing a whole town took a lot out of Jesus.
Sometimes we all have to just get away and pray.

That’s what Jesus did.

In this scene, I imagine Jesus remembering that voice from heaven at his baptism.

The voice that said,
“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

He certainly needed to remember that voice.
His ministry was just beginning.
And things are going to heat up in a hurry.

But, his heaven centered reverie is interrupted.

HUNTED WHILE PRAYING

Now we come to the fourth and final scene.

Jesus may have been in a place that was dark and deserted.
But, those who needed to be healed would not leave Jesus alone.

Simon and his companions track Jesus down.
And they said, “Everyone is searching for you.”

I love Jill’s title for this section,
“Hunted While Praying.”

The needs of the world are relentless.
“Everyone is searching for you Jesus.
What are you doing way out here all alone?”

...And “presto, chango” the sweet hour of prayer is turned into the sweet 15 minutes of prayer!

So, how did Jesus respond after being hunted down while praying?

Did he say, “Leave me alone,
I need to recharge my batteries?”
Did he sigh ...
and reluctantly follow the disciples back?

He did neither.

Jesus was not going back.
But, he wasn't leaving this town without a shepherd.

I think that, like Simon's mother in law,
all those people who had been healed
and delivered of their demons...

Those people were now in a position to serve others in the name of Jesus.

In this town the healing touch of Jesus multiplied the possibilities for ministry.

And that needs to happen in other places.

He tells the disciples that there are other people who need to be healed,
...other people who need to have the demons cast out of their life,
...other people who need to hear good news.

So, no, we're not going back.
We're moving on.

GROUNDHOG DAY

And that's exactly what they did.

They traveled throughout Galilee.

And the same thing happened
again and again and again.

The gospel was preached.
The sick were healed.
Demons were cast out.

And Jesus moved on to teach
and heal in another place
...leaving people who had been healed and delivered to serve in his place.

The ministry was multiplying exponentially.

What did all this mean?
Why was important that Jesus heal the sick and drive out the demons?

It was a preview of coming attractions
The time had come.
The kingdom of God was near.

There's a comedy called Groundhog Day.
In that movie, Bill Murray gets to live the same day over and over and over
again.

Today's lesson is a bit like that movie.
It seems like Jesus is living the same day over and over and over again.

The setting may change.
But, no matter where Jesus went,
the needs of the people were the same.

They needed to be healed.
They needed to have their demons cast out.
They needed to hear good news.

CONTEXT OF MINISTRY

I had a course in seminary entitled, "Context of Ministry."

The thesis behind that course was we needed to be aware of what was going on in the world in order to make our ministry relevant and effective.

That's true of course.

I think of all that has changed in the past few years.
We've made great strides in communication and transportation.

The community in which we live is filled with people from all over the world.

But, that also means there can be a clash of cultures and belief systems.

We can feel like strangers in our own home town.

Social media and the internet has revolutionized how we live.

We're connected with all sorts of people;
...while at the same time sometimes feeling disconnected from everyone.

In fact, I read this week that some people are so enamored with their Facebook profile,
that they actually hire a company to add fake friend profiles to their Facebook account!

But, we know in our hearts that real friends are not virtual.

Real friends are flesh and blood.

FLESH AND BLOOD MINISTRY

With Jesus,
we get a flesh and blood friend,
and a flesh and blood Savior.

When Jesus comes to us when the word is made flesh...the Spirit of God becomes a lived reality in our lives

You see when Jesus lifts us up and heals us ...
(like he did for Peter's mother in law long ago)
...that's not the end of the story.

When we're healed by Jesus,
there's a mission that goes with that healing.
We too have been commissioned to go out to serve in his name.

But, that will never happen...
if we are not honest about our need to be healed.
That will not happen...
... if we are not honest about our need
to be delivered from our demons.

Salvation begins when we are honest enough
...to strike out into the darkness of our despair
...and brave enough to come to the desert of our deepest need.

A FAITH THAT REMEMBERS

And, I have found this to be true as well...
This healed to serve model is not a one time thing.

From time to time we lose our way.
We lose our sense of mission.

Like the little cartoon fish, Dory,
we forget the way back home.

And so, like the disciples old,
we go in search of Jesus.

And in the darkness of the desert
in the early morning hours,
we find him.

He's praying.
And do you know who he's praying for?

That's right.
He's praying for us.

Despite all that has changed in our world,
some things remain the same.

We still need to be healed.
We still need to have our demons to cast out.

And in this age of 24/7 bad news...
...now more than ever...
we long to hear some good news.

In a world where many of us feel lost and alone,
we desperately want to find our way back home.

Jesus knew that we're a lot like Dory the fish.
We can't seem to remember.
We're easily distracted by the things that cross our path each day.

So he gave us a way to remember,
a sacramental mnemonic device, if you will.

We call it the Lord's Supper.

"Do this...in remembrance of me."

Jesus gives us something that we touch.
Jesus gives us something that we can taste.

And Jesus gives us someone,
a flesh and blood person,
a member of the church, the body of Christ,

...who passes the bread and the cup
and reminds us,

The body of Christ broken for you.
The blood of Christ shed for you.

You are forgiven.

You are healed.

You can let go of your demons.
They have no power here.

We spend our lives trying to find Jesus
...or at least trying to find the things that Jesus brings,
healing, hope, peace of mind...

But, much to our surprise,
we don't find Jesus.

Jesus finds us.

Hear the good news.
The time is fulfilled.
The kingdom of God is at hand.

Amen.