

First Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, MI
"Souper Day"
Rev. Lou Nyiri
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This morning's message is based upon Psalm 111 and Mark 1: 29-39, let's lean in & listen intently...to God's word for us this day...

Psalm 11 (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)
Song of Trust in God - *To the leader. Of David.*

- ¹ In the Lord I take refuge; how can you say to me,
"Flee like a bird to the mountains,^[a]
² for look, the wicked bend the bow,
they have fitted their arrow to the string,
to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart.
³ If the foundations are destroyed,
what can the righteous do?"
⁴ The Lord is in his holy temple;
the Lord's throne is in heaven.
His eyes behold; his gaze examines humankind.
⁵ The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked,
and his soul hates the lover of violence.
⁶ On the wicked he will rain coals of fire and sulfur;
a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.
⁷ For the Lord is righteous;
he loves righteous deeds;
the upright shall behold his face.

Mark 1:29-39 (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)
Jesus Heals Many at Simon's House

²⁹ As soon as they^[a] 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 sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed by 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.

A Preaching Tour in Galilee

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 all Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Let us Pray:

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.
Come as the fire and burn,
Come as the wind and cleanse,
Come as the light and reveal,

Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:

That the words of my mouth

And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,
for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

Sermon

It's always good to know where one is at within a Gospel reading of God's Good News.

This morning we find ourselves meandering alongside the Good News Writer Mark...whose telling of Jesus life, death, resurrection, ascension, etal. begins thus:

First on the scene is John the Baptist (more appropriately the Baptizer) – Jesus' cousin – the one who leapt for joy in utero when his mother spoke with Mary just after Mary learned of her pregnancy.

John's role was preparing the way for Jesus' arrival – declaring to people who stopped to hear his riverside talks, "...one more powerful than me is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie this one's sandals. I baptize with water; he will baptize with the Holy Spirit." (1:7-8)

Jesus approaches John in the river Jordan and is baptized.

As Jesus comes up out the water, he [Jesus] sees the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descends like a dove on him. A voice comes from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (1:9-11)

Immediately, we read, the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness for forty days where he is tempted by Satan, surrounded by wild beasts, waited on by angels. (1:12-13)

Jesus – in essence – is discerning his call by God.

He exits the wilderness – enters Galilee & proclaims God's Good News, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near; repent (turn around), and believe in the good news." (1:14-15)

However, just before this proclamation – Mark offers a qualifier – this all happened, "...after John was arrested."

- It is a somber realization that proclaiming repentance (a new way of living – a turning away from old ways of believing, seeing, being & doing – and facing our lives toward God's Good News – this is an act which calls us to live what we believe...practice what we preach)
- This repentance proclamation by Jesus does not prevent the possibility of arrest...thus, Mark begins Jesus' ministry with a bit of dangerous foreshadowing.

This entrance into Galilee also marks the beginning of Jesus' work within the first major section of Mark's Good News Account – from this point until chapter 11 – Jesus' narrative is filled with healings, controversies and teaching of Jesus' ministry in and around Galilee.

The first thing Jesus does is call the First Disciples – Simon, Andrew, James, and John – fishermen by trade – Jesus calls to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (1:16-20)

- At this point, Jesus is simply inviting them to come and see – check it out – learn a bit more about this Good News Message – then after a while – they’ll be charged to carry the Good News Message forward (but that’s off in the distance) – for now it’s good to note that while watching and learning are important to faith maturation – there are points where enacted faith is the natural & needed response. (cf. Mark 16:8ff)

Together – Jesus and the First Disciples – enter the synagogue in Capernaum on the sabbath – and Jesus teaches. Jesus teachings astound the listeners for “...he taught as one having authority...” Then something happens – a man with an unclean spirit cries out, “What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth? ... I know you are the Holy One of God.” And Jesus rebukes [the unclean spirit], saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” The unclean spirit convulses the man and crying with loud voice, came out of him.

People were amazed – word gets out & Jesus’ fame begins to spread throughout Galilee. (1:21-28)

- Jesus’ first healing is an exorcism of a demon that knows – really knows who Jesus is and what he has come to do. Could be this demon is trying to get the upper hand on Jesus for to know one’s identity was to give power over them – or – it could be evidence of the cosmic world recognizing Jesus’ authority, an authority which in the human world is continually challenged. Whatever the reason, people are taking (and will take) notice because for Jesus, fame comes not because he encourages it. People just know there’s something different about this Jesus because his actions and his message are congruent.

Which brings us to today’s text. (1:29-39)

Jesus heals Simon’s mother-in-law and many others in the town.

First, Simon has to be the world’s greatest son-in-law – his spouses Mum is sick with fever – he brings his newly made friend home for dinner who “took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her...”

Second, her response, “...she began to serve them...” is **not** indicative of gender role – it is indicative of our interactions with one another in response to God’s goodness – the phrase *she served them* is the same word used earlier of the angels actions toward Jesus’ in the wilderness temptation – it is said, “[they] *waited on (they served) Jesus*” – we respond to God’s grace with gratitude and often a grateful response is evidenced in serving those around us.

Let me briefly mention how today’s text ended...after a night of Jesus curing many who were sick and casting out demons – recalling how the text puts it “...the whole city was gathered around the door...” *which is a tad more than a few* – what does Jesus do?

“While it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.” Jesus knew life and faith are less sprints and more marathon – care for others is preceded by care for oneself.

Proper rest, exercise, diet, time spent with the Divine or other faithful persons – all these elements lessen our risk of burnout. It’s okay to turn the computer off, silence the phone, go for a walk – those acts are wholistic & holy behaviors – strengthening mind, body, spirit & soul – affording us more energy and stamina to care for those around us.

Before discussing how we might care for others, let me tell a quick story:

Setting the table for dinner one evening, two little girls entertained themselves by bringing the utensils to life. Her mother listened as knives, forks and spoons held a conversation while wrestling their way to the table.

One of the girls looked to their mother and declared, “If I had to choose – I’d be a spoon!”

“A spoon,” her mother asked, intrigued. “Why would you want to be a spoon? What’s wrong with being a knife or a fork?”

“Well,” the girl explained, “forks are grabby – always stabbing stuff and taking it like it’s theirs. I don’t like it at school when somebody takes one of my tater-tots with their fork and eats it.”

“Okay,” the mother agreed, “what about the knife?”

“Knives are scary and you can’t really eat with them. They just slice stuff up,” she said.

“But,” the little girl continued, holding a shiny spoon in front of her face, “spoons can scoop up lots of stuff and even pass it around. They’re just…”

“…Nice and round and smooth and friendly,” her mother suggested.

Her daughter’s eyes lit up.

“Right!” she exclaimed. “I’d rather be a spoon!”

From hot soup to cold ice cream – instead of grabbing or slicing – spoons are designed to serve.

Where might we serve up generous doses of God’s grace?
What are some of the dis-eases we might help alleviate?

I think of:

- I recall a story I saw on the evening news of two middle school children who walked to their local hospital during a snowstorm to brush snow off the cars of doctors, nurses, physical plant workers, cafeteria staff, so when hospital staffers left work they could just get in their cars and go home. Why, did they do it? To paraphrase their answer, “We’re thankful for them being here for us and this is the least we can do.”
- I think about those who check on neighbors to make sure they’re doing well – I read somewhere of two neighbors who created simple window check-ins – a green paper taped to the window means “all is good” – a yellow “I could use a phone call sometime soon” – a red “I have an urgent matter” – what if we created text codes where all we did was text the word Green / Yellow / Red to a trusted friend who knew what it meant and followed up accordingly?
- I think of those who call a neighbor/relative/friend when they go to the supermarket or getting ready to place a curbside delivery order and ask, “is there anything I can add to this order for you?”
- What can you think of?

One more story, then I'll sit down...

A man had a vision that he was talking with God. He said, "I want to know what heaven is like."

God took the man to a place that had two doors, and said, "Behind one is heaven. Behind the other is *the other place*."

The man opened one door and looked in. In the middle of the room was a large table – in the middle of the table was a large pot of stew. The stew smelled delicious. His mouth watered.

The people seated around the table though were emaciated and famished.

Strapped to their arms were spoons with very long handles. So long were these spoons that each person found it impossible to get a spoonful of stew from the pot to their mouth because the handle was longer than their arms.

The man shuddered at this sight of misery and suffering. He closed the door, knowing which room he was looking into.

He opened the next room's door and saw a scene almost exactly like the first one. There was a table with a large stew pot and again it smelled delicious and his mouth watered.

The difference was in the people. While equipped with the same long-handled spoons, these people were well nourished, vibrant and alive as they laughed and talked with each other.

The man was perplexed. He said to God, "I don't understand."

"It's simple," God replied. "It requires but one skill."

"You see, they have learned to feed each other."

"Some think only of themselves. My Son, the Beloved, was thinking of you all."

May we humbly approach worship and faith with anticipation of receiving God's gift of grace. May we humbly walk away from such encounters to share the gift of grace with others.

May we learn to feed & care for ourselves & each other.

Amen.