

Sermon – Mark 1:29-39
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“The New Normal”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace this day in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Yesterday, Jesus the healer came to Grace. No, the woman who was administering COVID-19 vaccinations in our gym did not look like a first-century Palestinian Jewish man. But I could tell Jesus was in the building. While I arrived at Grace excited that we had the opportunity to host a clinic for 100 people, I didn't expect it to feel *holy*. But that's exactly the word for the experience. Jesus was present, in the work of the woman giving the shots and in the work of the many, many people who have used their God-given ingenuity to create this and other vaccines. It was a joy to be together, to see people here, some of whom I hadn't seen in-person since last March. As a quick aside, with only 100 doses and not much advance notice, we kept our focus on those over sixty-five, as well as Grace staff members to help keep our school as safe as possible. We are hoping to host more clinics, and have told the pharmacy we're willing and able to do just that. We'll keep you posted! And a quick shoutout to Pat Gulik, our parish nurse, and our Health Cabinet for making these and future arrangements. Yes, Jesus the healer came to Grace yesterday. When he shows up, everything changes, beginning with you.
2. Long before Jesus the healer came to the Grace gymnasium, he came to Capernaum. After staring down the demon in the synagogue, Jesus goes to Simon's house. In the midst of this global pandemic in which fevers rage, we hear of Simon's mother-in-law (yes, Simon Peter was married!) and learn

that she was sick. Ill with a fever to the point that she was confined to her bed. Whatever her normal duties and passions, she had been forced to give them up for a time. Illness will do that to you. But Jesus the healer shows up, and everything changes. The details are sparse. If Jesus spoke to her, his words are lost to us. There is no comment about her great faith, no commentary on the works for which he was sent. Jesus simply takes her by the hand and raises her up. It's the same word used to describe what happened to Jesus on Easter. Jesus *resurrects* this woman. Where once death threatened, new life now breaks forth. For her, everything changes. Mark tells us that she began to serve them. This is no reinforcement of old roles and stereotypes. As theologian Ofelia Ortega writes, the woman "interprets the gifts that she has received; her service cannot be understood as a woman's menial work under the domination of lazy males, but as a true messianic ministry. For this reason, this woman is Jesus' first servant and joins him in the radical announcement, in action, of the kingdom of God." No, Jesus has not restored her to who or what she was before; Jesus has ushered her into the new future God is unfolding, a world in which we focus on serving others in the name of Christ. This is the new normal of resurrection living, the life to which Jesus draws us.

3. Where are we drawn? For what do we long? What healing do we need? In the midst of pandemic, we pray for the sick, that they will recover; for the healthy, that they would remain so; for the mourning, that they would be comforted; for everyone, that we might emerge from this. Forced separation itself is like a sickness, stealing from us the joys of community and opportunities to serve one another. But as Victoria Lynn Garvey notes in a recent issue of *The Christian Century*, "When [Jesus] cures someone from disease, he always restores them – not only to health, but also to hearth." Simon's mother-in-law and the others healed here by Jesus can once again return to their families and resume their lives as full members of their communities. As they return, they return changed. How could they go back to

the old ways after Jesus had touched their lives, raised them up? Raised up to lives of service is the new normal.

4. The story is told of the 1952 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize coming to Chicago. Albert Schweitzer – physician, organist, theologian, humanitarian, Lutheran – was once referred to by *Time* magazine as “the greatest man in the world.” It doesn’t seem to have gone to his head. As he stepped off the train that day, he bypassed the city officials and the flashing cameras. He made his way through the crowd to where an elderly woman was struggling with her suitcases. He picked up the suitcases, carried them to her bus, helped her board, and wished her a safe journey. Only then did he turn his attention to the crowd that was waiting for him. A member of the reception committee turned to a reporter and said, “That’s the first time I ever saw a sermon walking.” Schweitzer may have been the first walking sermon this person had ever seen, but Jesus has been turning people into walking sermons since that Sabbath day in Capernaum. Sadly, Simon’s mother-in-law’s name is lost to us, but her witness is not. Her life, given all of two verses in the story, shows us the new normal of God’s kingdom that claims us when we are healed by Jesus.

5. As we begin, maybe, a little, to emerge from this pandemic, we are invited to live into the new normal that God is creating in Christ. Do we want nothing more than to go back to where we were before? Or have we learned something in the meantime? As Isaiah might ask us: Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you? The prophet reminds us of our forgetfulness; we are amnesiacs when it comes to faith, always forgetting where we’ve been, what God would have us learn. As Jesus journeys with us, lifting us up to new life again and again, we are called to remember that we can do a much better job caring for one another and protecting human life; that those who serve others are not to be looked down upon but emulated; that simple kindness goes a long way; that “we’re all in this together” is not

simply a catchphrase but the truth. But before and beyond any of this, we see again today Jesus the healer coming into our midst, changing everything. With the touch of his hand, still bearing his wounds from the cross, he raises us up. Jesus is working healing in this land, in your life; healing from separation and self-centeredness, from racism and deep divisions, from illness and grief, from the forces of sin, death, and the devil. Jesus, in the waters of your baptism, has healed you.

6. I wish we knew her name, but we do have her witness. Healed by Christ, let us stand up like Simon's mother-in-law and serve as she did. To be healed by Christ is to become more like Christ, living with his power and life at work in us. Today, Jesus the healer comes to Grace, with grace. You have been raised up. We have a ways to go yet, but we look to the end of this pandemic with hope, trusting that God will bring us through. Not back to where we were, but to lives transformed for the sake of the gospel and as signs of the in-breaking reign of God. Yes, sin and sickness linger on, but Christ heals the brokenhearted and binds up your wounds by the power of his wounds. Joined to the death of Christ, you are joined to his unending life. You are healed, raised up, transformed for new life in Christ. Restored to one another, let us look to the needs of others, trusting that we have what we need from God. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep you hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.