

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.

### "Rule Breaker"

After a long, thrilling day with Jesus a new day had dawned for the four disciples following Jesus. They rubbed their bleary eyes as they woke and scanned the room for Jesus. Where was he and what was all the ruckus at the door about? Apparently everyone in the vicinity had heard about Jesus' healing powers and had come to be healed. But Jesus was nowhere in sight. Fear swept over Simon, Andrew, James and John. What were four brand new disciples to do with such a crowd clamoring for Jesus the healer? Who could wait for him to return and bear the crowd's pressure?

The disciples left the house to hunt for Jesus, to bring him back to the pleading crowd. Jesus must not know people were waiting for him to cast out their demons and to cure their illnesses! We aren't told how long it took the four to chase him down, but by the time they found him they had some strong words to say! Jesus had told them to follow him and fish for people. Well lots of people were currently parked at Simon and Andrew's door waiting. "Everyone is searching for you!" they shouted out of breath.

The people were searching for a healer. All the disciples knew of Jesus so far was his power to heal the sick, cast out demons and teach with authority. Why was he taking off to a deserted place when there was work to be done? In the privacy of Simon and Andrew's house the disciples had watched as Jesus "came and took Simon's ill mother-in-law by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them." Simon's mother-in-law was well enough to get right up and return to her role as matriarch of the house, serving her guests. Jesus hadn't turned a single person away. The disciples felt like they had seen everything Jesus was capable of!

Having found him in the deserted place, the disciples intended to take Jesus back to the crowd waiting for him. Yet Jesus states there is other work to do. Other work? What could be more important than healing those who are lined up and waiting at Simon and Andrew's home? What was he talking about? Moving on before he was finished in Capernaum? As they followed, they must have wondered what would happen to all the people waiting at Simon and Andrew's home?

Sometimes it seems to us as if God has taken off right when we need God most. An accident turns our lives upside down. Loved ones suffer from illnesses; we suffer. The life of the world is in turmoil. Injustice and corruption seem to be the rule of the day. The disciples had yet to learn that this worldly healing was not Jesus' only mission. The life of faith often leads disciples to ask, "Why?" and "Where are we going, God?" Those who place their hope in Christ are portrayed to the end of Mark as those left with questions. They are astounded and wonder about the full meaning of Jesus' words and actions. Not understanding fully what God has done, they flee the empty tomb and told no one of what they saw because they were afraid. Jesus teaches and shares, but some answers will only be revealed in God's time. We also know that our

hope in God does not provide all the answers we want to the deep questions and complexities of suffering and evil in our world.

Jesus had gone to a deserted place for the second time in Mark. The first time he emerged after being tempted to proclaim the good news and call the first disciples. After a long day and night of teaching and healings, he now needed to get away from the noise and crowds to draw close to God again. Like any human he looked for space to pray in order to discern God's will for his life. We know and we have heard what the disciples had not yet heard. In Jesus the everlasting God chose to faint with weariness as we do! God chose to give ultimate hope to those who are weary, sick, grieving and to the outcast, the oppressed and all sinners by fully living a human life. After Jesus' life was over God chose to make a way of hope where there was none, raising Jesus from the dead. God's healing agenda expands to an eternal promise for wholeness and restoration. Now we, like the prophet in Isaiah, can proclaim a time where we will mount up with wings like eagles no matter what our mental or physical condition is here in this world. Those who never took a step in their lives, and the rest of us who have grown tired, will run and not be weary! Yet we understand this good news as those who still live in the shadow of the cross, waiting and hoping for the time when there will be no suffering. The healing work the disciples have seen Jesus engage in points toward the cross and the resurrection and cannot be fully understood on its own. The disciples must be brought on board for the journey of Jesus' ministry. It was time to move on.

When Jesus emerged from the deserted place the second time the disciples were with him to watch as he proclaimed the good news of God and performed many healings in other towns. They are with Jesus as his rule breaks into the lives of individuals and the life of the world. With the disciples we find our place in his work of healing. Our lives are to "proclaim the message" that the reign of God had come near shattering the rule of this world's power of death and suffering through the work and person of Jesus Christ! We "proclaim the message" when we share the good news and partner in God's transformational work of healing. The Rev. Mary Moore Roberson calls this work "our partnership in God's openhandedness" towards us. She relays our part of this work through the story of one church member named Barbara.<sup>1</sup>

Barbara was a member of a very affluent church Mary served. But Barbara was poor. The house in which she and her 10-year-old son, Jeffrey, lived was taken away. They lived in their car and then in the Jesse Jackson Townhomes, a public housing project filled with the crack of guns and cocaine. The place might as well have had a sign over its entrance: Abandon hope all ye who enter here.

But Barbara did not abandon hope. Instead the church staff often found Barbara at their office door requesting what she needed to get by. Time after time the church and staff gave Barbara just what she was asking for. They provided temporary relief for the situation at hand, ignoring the gaping disparity between what they were offering and what would bring real healing and wholeness to the woman and child. One day a member of the staff said, "Let's stop messing around and really help her. It's going to take a lot of money. Some may say we're crazy. But we can live through that." Mary said he "brought us up short. He brought us into the room where the healing touch of our Lord awaited."

Barbara enrolled in nursing school, living in a furnished apartment donated for the time it took her to complete her education, driving a car provided by another parishioner, her tuition and day-to-day expenses were taken care of. Barbara came to call her story "God Helps." Her conviction that God would see her desperate need, would care about her, would cause her whole life to be re-ordered was fulfilled. In fact, God had brought her through the door into the place where God had chosen for all this to be done.

A straight-A student and only a step away from receiving her cap, Barbara announced, "I want to come speak to the vestry at its next meeting." She did come and stood there before the church's leaders, the rector and the 12 rich business people and the civic movers and shakers. She stood erect in her white uniform, a stethoscope around her neck and told her story of the eking

away of her life and of the miracle of her new life and its purpose. She said, "Thank you for helping me when I could not help myself. Because of you, I am going to be able to help others. I want you to know this. Every single time I touch a person for healing, this parish will touch that person with me. You will be right there."

Our proclamation of God's good news and God's use of us to help in the healing God desires go hand-in-hand. As Jesus' ministry unfolds in Mark's gospel we will see over and over that the word of promise and its fulfillment go together and that the disciples are brought into Jesus' active ministry of healing. God is sovereign over all, yet invites us to be ready to serve the Reign of God breaking into the world in Jesus and now by the power of the Spirit. Keep praying for healing, wholeness and peace for individuals and for God's world—these prayers are mandated in both Jewish and Christian scriptures. Yet also pray that God would guide us to engage in God's transformational work of healing and peacemaking as partners. As we pray for God's healing and open ourselves to partner with God, we will find assurance that we are following the One who broke the shadow side of this world's rule, Jesus our Christ! Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> This story was adapted (some parts verbatim) from "I Will, With God's Help" a sermon by the Rev. Mary Moore Roberson on February 5, 2006, broadcast by Day One.