

**“Healed to Serve” – Reverend Jennifer Adams**  
**Epiphany 5B – February 8, 2009**

I have to admit that one of my first responses to this gospel is always a little sarcastic. Jesus and his disciples left the synagogue and went to Simon and Andrew’s house. Simon (who will later be named Peter), his mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever, and so he told Jesus about her. And Jesus came, took the woman by the hand and lifted her up. And then the fever left. End of story? No. What happened immediately after that? Did she take a warm bath, put on her fuzzy slippers and cozy robe and let health sink back into her bones? Did she go out and breathe-in the fresh air, stretch her legs, or hunker down and take one more nap in order to re-enter her world slowly? No. She immediately began to serve them! And that’s when I get sarcastic. And then part of my mind hears the story this way: They came home after a long time in the synagogue and they were very, very hungry. Simon’s mother-in-law was too sick to serve them and they needed supper. But while faithfully deepening themselves in very spiritual ways, none of these guys could cook. So they told Jesus about their near crisis situation. And THEN the woman was healed and THEN she got up. And THEN she made them supper and served and fed them. And I’m guessing that a father-in-law with a fever would have led to a different end to the story.

But the more I think about this story, the less sarcastic I get and the more hopeful I become. Because on some level, isn’t all of this our hope? Isn’t what happened to Peter’s-Mother-in-Law our vision for ourselves and our church and even our world? Don’t we hope that we are healed and well enough, humble enough, strong enough to serve, and not only that - but we want to or are at least led to serve? And what if this happened to everyone? What we healed our cities and the response was that everyone immediately took care of their neighbors? What if we healed our environment and immediately were aware of the ways in which it serves us all the time? What if we healed our larger church and immediately put all of our energies and resources into serving and loving and giving beyond ourselves out into the world? Not the worst of outcomes really. So, what if Peter’s Mother-in-Law is a model for all of us?

Well, word got around pretty quickly and at sundown they brought all who were sick or possessed with demons to Jesus. And the whole city was gathered around the door, the story says. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons and at the end of the story he moved on to a neighboring town to proclaim the message and to bring the hope of healing to others too. Peter’s Mother-in-Law was only the beginning, the tip of the iceberg. It appears that all of this was an absolute priority for Jesus – this healing and serving and proclaiming good news. Jesus even said that it was what he had come to do.

And so I leave this story thinking the problem was actually that not enough people did what Peter’s mother-in-law did and not enough people do it now. I think sometimes we get so wrapped up in our own need to be healed, that we forget that we have gifts of service to offer

too. Or the flipside of that happens: we get so wrapped up in serving that we don't take time to tend to the ways we need to be healed and our serving never reaches its potential because our healing doesn't either. You can see the challenge.

We need both and have been invited into both: the healing and the serving and neither is whole without the other. Finding a balance between the two or a synchronicity between the two is a life-goal. Some of the best servants I have known are those who serve from the places in themselves that have known illness, or weakness or brokenness of some kind. These are the people Henri Nouwen called "wounded healers" and it was his belief that the best ministry is done by those who approach it that way. Nouwen believed that people who attend to their own fevers and allow bits of light to touch those places; he believed that their first-hand experience of painful circumstances could become gift to others if they were also willing to serve. That's one way a balance can happen.

And so maybe one of the best things that happened in this story was that Simon and Andrew and James and John were hungry, or that their hearts were so concerned about the woman with fever that they brought Jesus to her. It doesn't matter really. Maybe it was both working together to bring Jesus into their midst and the woman into a new wholeness. What matters is that Jesus healed. Period. And Peter's Mother-In-Law was healed. Period. And then she served. Exclamation point. And they feasted and then they all served and then others were healed and more good news was proclaimed and the gospel carried on.

May our lives tell that story too.

Amen.