

Karen Hollis  
Sermon – Feb 4, 2018  
Mark 1:29-39

The need is overwhelming. The need is always enormous. It seems no matter where Jesus goes and how much work he does, the need will still be tremendous. No matter how many people learn the art of healing in Jesus' name, it seems the need will still overshadow healing. A mother is heartsick and panicked about her son's addiction. A man sets out on an adventure and along the way loses not only the purpose of the journey, but his sense of himself. A community is caught by the shock and grief of a mass shooting in their school. A woman suddenly finds herself on dialysis, waiting year after year for a kidney transplant. A young person struggles daily to walk again after a car accident. A lover grieves the death of their beloved.

A mother lays sick with a fever - the kind that knocks you out for a week with nausea and body aches, and makes you put life on hold – she is so sick that she loses weight on an already thin frame. When her son-in-law brings home some friends and a Rabbi named Jesus she barely notices. He must have told the Rabbi about her illness, otherwise why would he be at her bedside. And suddenly she is on her feet, the sickness is flushing from her body and she is restored to wholeness. She looks down and her hand is in his – healing just with the touch of his hand. When we have an experience of healing this clear, we understand Jesus and the Kingdom of God on a whole other level. She responds to this healing not as a woman or housewife of this time, but as a deacon, a servant. In the Hebrew and Christian scriptures people are often given new names when something significant happens in their lives, names that describe their new identity. In response to her service as the first deacon of the church and my own irritation about her as a nameless woman of scripture, I give her the name, Rebekah, which means join – appropriate for her experience of being joined with Christ in her healing. Rebekah understands Jesus' mission far better than the disciples do – the disciples only see the need in front of them and encourage Jesus to stay and heal every last person in Galilee. Rebekah feeds them for the journey ahead.

Jesus has no issues with healing on the Sabbath, but the people who hear about Jesus wait until sunset, when the Sabbath is over, to knock on Simon's door. They crowd around and press in around the door to get their turn and see this man at work. Those in need are gathered in the centre to wait their turn. Jesus is changing the fabric of their community in a couple of different ways.

Firstly, Jesus rejects the common belief that illness or bad fortune are punishment for sin. When Jesus heals, he takes sick, broken, fractured, grieving, lost and restores them to wholeness. We are unbelievably complex beings and the manifestation of our brokenness is unique to each of us. The need in the world is so great partly because, being restored to wholeness is not a 1 shot deal. Think about the number of times you have needed to heal in your life. Or how many times you needed healing for the same thing. We find ourselves in need of healing because we are humans on a path, not because we are bad. Though we may stray from God, that has natural consequences, not ones that show up to shame us into fidelity. Brokenness manifests in the body, or as dancer Martha Graham said, "the body never lies." So much of who we are lives inside our bodies as a big mystery of self, always offering a new layer to be explored. In healing Jesus, the master, gets out of the way and allows the power of God to move through his own body, through his hands, transforming all that we bring, into wholeness that is freely offered by God.

When I was about half way through seminary, I was going through a rough time; all I remember is that I was confused about God, theology, my life, just a lot of big questions that hit really close to home. So I sought out some wisdom in a Jesuit priest I knew at Seattle University,

where I was going to school. Fr. Pat Twohy was in his 70's and had spent most of his ministry on the Swinomish reservation in Anacortes, WA – I knew him through a Native American classmate of mine who grew up in his parish. Fr. Pat is not a charismatic man, but he is as I imagine Jesus to be in his lack of ego: he is so clear, so present, so engaged in the present moment, and exudes humility and generosity. He greeted me for our meeting and invited me to sit . . . and between the time I shook his hand and settled into my chair, I knew every answer to every question I had coming in. Simply being in the presence of such clarity gave me peace – so much peace that I can't tell you to this day exactly what I was confused about. We laughed together as I confessed my sudden clarity and had a wonderful conversation.

I imagine the city gathered around Simon's doorway, being changed by the presence of Jesus. Not just those who are touched by Jesus, but the whole community, as they stand in Jesus' presence and watch their whole outlook on life change before their eyes. Jesus' very presence changes the atmosphere, changes the energy in the room. He is so clear in himself that he is able to bring people who are willing and ready into alignment just by being there. For all those who are effected by Jesus, they must notice it, name it, give thanks for it and go from there, conducting themselves out of this new reality. This community is transformed, right in Simon's home, the place of family, closeness and intimacy. The early church gathered in homes; they ate together, shared the struggles and celebrations of their lives, read scriptures together and invited the spirit of Christ into their midst to be transformed in community by his presence.

When we turn from this story we can still see clearly the need in the world. We can still see what is overwhelming. Our neighbours to the south are constantly remind us about the fragility of life with new and fresh ways of bringing confusion and destruction to our world. We can still see the anchorages off the north-east side of Gabriola. We continue to live with personal struggles we cannot control. But remember, evil knows Jesus even better than we do. When Jesus casts out demons he doesn't allow them to speak because they will say, "Jesus, have you come to destroy us? You are the Holy One of God!" Jesus has work to do and doesn't need his ministry cut short by Romans who have heard the news of his presence, so he silences the demons to their truth that they know who he is and how devastating he is to their mission.

Jesus goes out before first light the next morning to pray – to connect with the source of creation, the deep well that sustains his work before moving on to the neighbouring villages. Jesus is not tired; Jesus is not weary. Jesus is fulfilling his purpose, supported by the living God. Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strength the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

This whole world was created through Christ – there is no part of it that is void of his presence. His healing presence can be found folded into the fabric of this world, particularly where community is gathered in Jesus' name. It is his purpose to transform lives and transform the world. The work is ongoing, but God is an endless wellspring of life. Thanks be to God!