

A Sermon for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
February 7, 2021  
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*Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my 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 strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and 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. Isaiah 40:21-31*

*After Jesus and his disciples 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. Mark 1:29-39*

It's been a long day for Jesus. He's been calling disciples, preaching and teaching in the synagogue, and he even cast out a demon from the man with an unclean spirit. Wrestling with demons, as we all know, is exhausting work, so wouldn't that be enough for one day? But the day just keeps on going because, "as soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew." It's the Sabbath day, and time for a most important part of observing Sabbath – the meal. Only there is no meal waiting because Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever.

A fever is a symptom, revealing that something is not well, that our body is fighting off an infection. By now all of us have probably experienced the pandemic procedure of having our temperature checked before we can enter the doctor's office, have our dental check-up, or enter any number of other places.

We are all too aware of the fevered pitch of our relationships these days, too. Partisan rhetoric about everyone and everything is as contagious as a virus. We know that fevers of any kind, when left unchecked, can be hazardous to our physical, mental, and spiritual health. Fevers disrupt our families and our communities, can be contagious, and indicate that we are sick and in need of healing on many levels.

Simon's mother-in-law was sick. Much has been said about Jesus healing her only so that she can get up and cook dinner for the guys, but I don't think that's what was happening here. Her fever was isolating her from her family and from the joy of preparing the Sabbath meal as part of her worship of God. Jesus wasted no time. "He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them."

When the fever left Simon's mother-in-law it was not the end of the story. When she was lifted up and relieved of her fever, Simon's mother-in-law lived out her thankfulness in service to God and others. This woman models the right response to God's healing power. She walks in the way of Jesus, she is not here to be served but to serve. Many see her as a disciple and a deacon.

We all suffer from the fevers of this life, especially in this present moment of a global health crisis. The reality of physical sickness is inescapable. Then too there are the emotional fevers that result from social isolation. We may feel frantic or lethargic, sometimes in a span of just five minutes! Hot or shaking with chills, exhausted or irritable, we are feverish.

When the pandemic began, we had industrious plans to do all the things we never seemed to find time for when things were "normal" like baking, reading, or cleaning out the garage. We did not yet have cabin fever! Then as time went on and we remained in exile, our spiritual fevers appeared and we began to feel like the grasshoppers Isaiah mentions, tiny inhabitants in a world we could no longer control. Where is the Holy One when our earthly rulers are making a mess of things? And then it can be all too tempting to crawl back into bed with our fevered bodies and give up.

And yet, Isaiah calls out to us, "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 strengthens the powerless." And then Isaiah comforts us with the words we so need to hear, "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."

Jesus makes this promise visible as he takes the hand of Simon's mother-in-law and lifts her up. Jesus makes this promise visible to us – he will take us by the hand and lift us up from our fevers! To be lifted up is to experience the nearness of the Kingdom. In fact the Greek word Mark uses here, *egiero*, is the same verb used on Easter morning when the angel tells the women at the tomb "he has been raised." The final and ultimate healing is to be lifted up into resurrected life in Christ. This is the good news we are called to proclaim!

In the meantime, here's something to think about. Mark notes that the whole city was gathered around the house of Simon and Andrew. Is not the whole city outside of every church door? Outside of our door? If Jesus is in our house, and as followers of Jesus we believe that he is here with us even when we are apart, then our response to Jesus will resemble that of Simon's mother-in-law. Much help is needed to care for so many.

As we consider our response to Jesus, we cannot ignore that Jesus also models for us the importance of self-care and prayer. He is intentional about taking time away from the intensity of proclaiming, teaching, and healing to spend time in solitude with God. Jesus demonstrates that we cannot do it all, that taking time to rest and pray is what strengthens us to serve one another. As we wait for the Lord, we will hear where God is calling us next.

Jesus comes to lift us up out of the changes and chances and fevers of life, even life so challenging as right now. Will we allow Jesus to take us by the hand, heal us, and lead us to new life? May we trust that the Holy One of creation is always caring for this world, so that we can rest and renew our strength and be ready to proclaim the good news. Amen.