

First Friends Church, a Quaker Meeting
Rev. Dr. Loletta M. Barrett
February 7, 2021
Casting Out
Mark 1:29-39

Reading

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.

Message

I want to stop and notice the dramatic statement we heard, "Jesus went, proclaiming the message... and casting out demons." I can't just gloss over it. He went proclaiming the message and casting out demons. We don't just go around proclaiming the message much less casting out demons. Demons! While it might be the shockiest shocker in this passage, there is plenty more to think about.

Today's scripture celebrates the abundant health we are called to share with others.

Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law of a fever just by taking her hand and helping her out of bed. Not miracle- it made him ritually unclean, transgressed social mores- a sick person and a woman! and it was a great risk to his health. Then, as in our day of Covid-19, a fever could be a death sentence. They had no

aspirin, antibiotics, knowledge disease, sterile procedures or contagion control.

Today we are blessed with health care providers exercising extensive precautions while caring for the sick of all ages, genders, ethnicities, religions and skin colors.

Jesus healed anyone who came to him. He didn't require money, listening to a sermon, a platinum insurance policy, or being part of preferred status group with an appointment at a select location. Healing was free; anyone, any time, any place. He told us whatever we do for the ill we do for him. Can we imagine going into a friend's house and touching someone who has a fever now or anytime?

No visitors are allowed at hospitals, rehabilitation centers, retirement communities, housing for disabled individuals, shelters for people without homes, or other care centers today. This challenges us to think about how we can be part of abundant physical health, well-being, and compassionate care for the poor, elderly, differently abled, ill and infirm in our community and world. It asks us how we can expand our health care to make abundant physical health and well-being a reality for all. How can we share our blessing of abundant physical health?

Healed, Simon's mother-in-law got up and served them. I wonder, did they send Jesus in to heal her out of compassion or so they could get a good meal?! Either way, as a good woman of her times, or a good servant of others, she gets up to serve. Remember Jesus told us if you feed the hungry you are doing it for him? This reminds us that to be healthy, people need access to the abundant nutritious

food and clean water God has provided us. It reminds us food pantries, soup hours, and programs for food stamps and women, infant and children have been stretched to the breaking point during the pandemic. But then they always are on a shoe string budget. It challenges us to gratefully appreciate God's abundant food and water resources by sharing them so we are all physically healthy.

Simon's mother-in-law, yet another saintly woman who gets no name, shows us the importance of two of aspects of mental health- meaningful work and connection with others. Her hospitality and service to the disciples engages her mind, body, spirit and heart. We know there are many other aspects of mental health and well-being, like brain and body chemical balance, reducing stress, and being able to handle personal, family, work and economic crises, which come all at the same time. This reminds us our daily lives are a challenge enough without the isolation of the past year, and calls us to find ways to reach out and help others be mentally healthy; to engage meaningfully and connect with others.

Simon had a house. He and his brother Andrew were fishermen, likely living at a subsistence level from catch to catch. Perhaps Simon invited Andrew and his mother-in-law to live in his house. He certainly gave her a bed when she was ill. They had a home in which to be a family, to rest and recover from illness, to prepare and share meals, to offer hospitality, and to create community. The

abundant blessing of a home is one that is too often taken for granted. No one should lack shelter and we can help others find safe healthy.

They left the synagogue. At a minimum they included: Jesus, Simon, Andrew, James and John. They worked, ate, travelled, rested and prayed together. They told Jesus about Simon's mother-in-law. Certainly they spoke about her illness, and raised it to a level of care, healing and prayer. They probably also told him she was a great cook, about her amazing hospitality, and appreciated and valued her. They created an abundance of community which brings heart health; the love, care, support and appreciation required to keep us emotionally healthy. We can share the abundant gift of heart health that is here in our meeting.

They left the synagogue. No, it's not a scratch in my record/CD nor did I lose my place. They left the synagogue; where teaching about God, learning values, and hearing about Spirit and Truth were respected. And while it was still dark Jesus went out to a deserted place and prayed. Jesus took time to rest and replenish his body and soul,¹ often modeling it by calling his disciples away to rest and pray. Abundant spiritual health comes from gathering to learn, worship, pray and be in relationship with God, together and in solitude. This year the spiritual health of our meeting experienced abundant growth as we worshipped, met in groups, and welcomed long time and new Friends.

¹ <http://newsletter.remixingfaith.com/issues/burned-out-306467>

The disciples told Jesus everyone was looking for him. Of course! People are always drawn to the Light; to abundant physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. Yet in spite of the crowd's accolades, appreciation or needs Jesus did not return to them. He immersed himself in time with God, heard Spirit's direction and moved on. He was not deterred from his purpose by trying to please and serve "everyone;" seeking approval, trappings of appearances, image-management, or external markers of success. He was not driven; willing to neglect his soul in pursuit of meeting expectations and appearing as if he had it all together. He was clear about his call, limits and needs, knew how to say no, and had good boundaries. His only concern was following God's leading and love and doing what God had for him to do.

We know that self-care and time with God are required to be replenished and connect to our Source. An abundantly healthy life and vocation requires knowing your role, your ministry and call and following it, not being distracted by all the things you could do for fame, meeting needs, or gathering approval of others. It requires the grounding that we have found in being present for meeting for worship, teaching and encouraging each other to grow spiritually and rest periodically, and making time for relationship with God.

Jesus cast out all that was unhealthy from himself, the people around him, and the society they were subjected to. "He came to heal the world, not only of its

illness, but of its unhealthy subjugation to empires. He came to exorcize the demonic lies that uphold oppressive systems. And this is a challenge to those of us who 'proclaim the message' today."² Jesus went proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. He immersed himself and everyone around him in the abundant health of mind, body, spirit and heart offered by God. If actions speak louder than words then the kingdom is healing, teaching, encouraging and sharing; where people are healed, fed, cared for, housed and brought into community and relationship with God.

It strikes me that Simon and Andrew were fishermen and did not know anything about casting out demons. I don't know much about fishing but what I know is you use a net or a pole with a hook. Fishing responsibly means you only keep the fish big enough to eat. And when you fish with children you have to be careful how they cast out their line or it can end up in the tree overhead.

Living an abundant healthy life in God we are freed not only from things that seek to make us unhealthy and oppress us, but also for a life of purpose, meaning, and ministry. In order to live into our abundance we need to ask: What unhealthy demons might we need to cast out? What line or net will we cast out to haul in a catch? How can we make what we cast more attractive? How can we

² "The Politics of Healing," John Allen, *Political Theology Today*, 2015.

avoid casting our line or net up into the trees instead of the stream? What and how will we share and what do we need to throw back?