

“Preaching and Healing: Two sides of one coin”
Mark 1:29-39
Sunday, February 4, 2018
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

Opening.

Do you ever feel stressed? Do you ever feel overwhelmed by the pressures of life? Do you ever feel like a prime candidate for membership in the Coronary and Ulcer Club?

The “Coronary and Ulcer Club” lists the following rules for members...

1. Your job comes first. Forget everything else.
2. Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays are fine times to be working at the office.
There will be nobody else there to bother you.
3. Always have your briefcase with you when not at your desk. This provides an opportunity to review completely all the troubles and worries of the day.
4. Never say “no” to a request. Always say “yes.”
5. Accept all invitations to meetings, banquets, committees, etc.
6. All forms of recreation are a waste of time.
7. Never delegate responsibility to others; carry the entire load yourself.
8. If your work calls for traveling, work all day and travel at night to keep that appointment you made for eight the next morning.
9. No matter how many jobs you already are doing, remember you can always take on more.

Makes me tired just to read that list. Of course this only describes the stresses of an office job; we could make similar coronary-ulcer lists for factory workers, stay-at-home-moms, artists, gardeners and so forth.

Point is, when we're trying to do our best at our job – whatever our job is – finding a balance can be difficult.

C. S. Lewis writes: “The moment you wake up each morning, all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists in shoving it all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in.”

This is what Jesus does in today's gospel reading.

I. Jesus' words and actions.

In this passage Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law, heals the sick, casts out demons and then, as “the whole city gathered around the door” – we can assume they were lining up, taking numbers, elbowing each other out of the way so as not to miss their chance to be healed -- he slips out and goes off to pray.

Sounds like an excellent plan to me. Great example for us to follow in terms of self-care and relying on God. We can't heal the world single-handedly. We can't heal the world without God. And the best way we've found to tune ourselves in to God is prayer.

The disciples don't see it that way. “Simon and his companions hunt for Jesus” (v. 36). The term used for “hunt” implies a hostile, angry attitude. This is the first time in Mark's gospel that Simon harshly questions Jesus' actions. He will do it again, when he “rebukes” Jesus for talking about suffering, crucifixion and death (8:32). Simon knows what Jesus should be doing. He should be with the crowds, healing and casting out demons.

Jesus clearly has other plans, including prayer.

This is also the first time the disciples oppose Jesus' plans for his own ministry. They say, “Everyone is searching for you.” Like Simon, they are perturbed that Jesus would waste

time praying when he could be casting out more demons. The disciples will oppose Jesus again, at the feeding of the five thousand, when they tell Jesus to send the crowds away hungry, to fend for themselves (6:36).

Despite the pressures from Simon, the other disciples, and the crowds, Jesus is clear about his mission and purpose.

One scholar muses “that Jesus went off by himself in order to laugh. In other words, when he couldn’t stand the kind of ridiculous expectations that his friends and followers kept making of him, eventually he went off to laugh just to keep his sanity. Well, maybe. Certainly, everybody seems to want a piece of him in this picture Mark paints. Maybe he went off by himself just to get some peace and quiet for a change. Who knows?” (Barry J. Robinson, paraphrasing G. K. Chesterton).

We do know that Jesus spends a great deal of time in prayer, to keep himself focused on his mission and purpose. He says in response to the angry, critical disciples, “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” (v. 38). In his own words, Jesus states what he came out to do: proclaim the message to as many folks as possible.

We might get from this that Jesus sees preaching as his sole purpose; everything else is a waste of his brief and precious time on earth. But in the next verse it says that Jesus “went through Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons” (v. 39).

Jesus proclaims his message through both preaching and healing. He speaks and he acts. Two sides of the same coin. When Jesus heals the sick, he is proclaiming God’s presence. When Jesus preaches in the synagogues, he brings the healing power of God’s kingdom.

Scholars who study ancient languages find that words for “healing” and words for

“salvation” are very similar. The meaning is clear. Jesus brings salvation, through his words and his actions. When he touches people, demons and diseases flee – folks are “healed.” They are “saved.” When he opens the scriptures and preaches the word, the scales fall from people’s eyes; their ears are opened up; they receive healing; they receive salvation. Preaching and healing, two sides of Jesus’ one mission: to bring salvation to a world in desperate need of saving.

II. Our words and actions.

Henri Nouwen, beloved priest and author of many books on spirituality, writes:

“When we think about the people who have given us hope and have increased the strength of our souls, we might discover that they were not the wardens or moralists, but the few who were able to articulate in words and actions the human condition in which we participate and who encouraged us to face the realities of life. Those who do not run from our pains but touch them with compassion bring healing and new strength. The paradox is that the beginning of healing is in the solidarity with the pain. In our solution oriented society it is more important than ever to realize that wanting to alleviate pain without sharing it is like wanting to save a child from a burning house without the risk of being hurt” (p. 43, Reaching Out).

Jesus shares our pain and shows us how to share one another’s pain. By our words and actions, we can show others that we are not afraid to be with them in their hurts and sufferings. We can show others that we will not run away at the first sign of pain. Rather than jumping immediately to solution-oriented bandaids, we can sit with hurting people. In Nouwen’s words, we can learn how to “articulate in words and actions the human condition in which we participate” and encourage one another to face the realities of life.

I started out talking about stress and coronaries and ulcers. These are conditions that beset us when we try to save the world under our own power. The power to change the world...the power to change ourselves...is in Jesus. Jesus shows us the way to salvation, to healing, through words and actions.

Touch is one of Jesus' healing acts. He touches people and they are saved...their sins are forgiven... demons fly away...people are healed.

W. E. Sangster was once asked if he would find time to cheer up a young man who was recuperating from a nervous breakdown. Sangster promised to do his best. He sought the young man out and began to try to help him, but it was hard work. "This is a gray world," the young man said. "I see no purpose in it. It is dull, meaningless and evil. Its pleasures soon pass. Its pains endure. I seriously ask myself the question: 'Is life worth living?'"

Sangster saw him once or twice a week for nearly two months. Every conversation was the same; nothing seemed to improve. Then something happened to that young man. He fell in love. Head over heels in love! On the day his engagement was announced he came to see Sangster and began the conversation with words something like this: "This is a lovely world. Come out into the garden and listen to that little bird singing fit to burst its heart. Isn't it a glorious morning? How good it is to be alive!" (source: King Duncan)

Closing.

That young man's perspective did not change through his own power. It was not a choice he made. Something happened to him. He fell in love.

This is how it is with Jesus. He enters our lives. He speaks. He acts. He touches us. Something happens to us. And we are changed.

May you experience Jesus' healing touch, and be changed. Amen.