Healing, Work and Rest

February 5, 2006 (Epiphany 5, Year B)

2 Kings 4:8-37 Psalm 142 1 Corinthians 9:16-23 Mark 1:29-39

There's a wonderful economy to this little piece of Mark's gospel, this second half of the story we began last week, a day in the life of Jesus, an example of what the Sabbath might have been like for him in the early days of his ministry in Capernaum, when he had only 4 disciples: Simon, Andrew, James, and John.

The author of this Gospel has an economy of storytelling, a taciturn, spare approach. The Good News according to Mark is half as short as the Good News according to Luke. This lets Mark get straight to the point, but it also means that Mark doesn't resolve his contradictions or tensions.

My father was like that with his stories. A Midwesterner, born in South Dakota to Scots-Canadian parents at the end of the Great Depression, my dad didn't waste words, or sometimes even use them when a simple *hmmm* would do. He'd start in the middle of the sentence, and finish before the end, leading to cryptic requests like "…would you get the?" leaving us to guess what he was asking for, and who he was asking.

The Gospel of Mark – the shortest, probably the oldest, gospel in our Bible – is very much the same way. He skips over the birth and childhood of Jesus, and in some of the earliest manuscripts of Mark, ends the Gospel with an empty tomb on Easter morning.

So, a taciturn storyteller. We hear it that brevity in the rather abrupt healing of the mother of Simon's wife, *Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.*

You might cynically say, as I did the first time I read through this passage, that it's a pretty sexist moment. I told Bic this week, Oh yes, the story where Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law so she can make them a nice lunch.

But maybe two things are also going on –*one*, Mark isn't interested in filling in background and connectors. Straight to the simple point: Jesus did this, and this happened in response.

Two, Simon's mother-in-law might be the sort of person who just couldn't sit still, determined to get the food on the table, serving up lunch for the guests, and probably making Simon and Andrew set the table and carry the dishes.

Mark, in his taciturn economy, leaves standing a wonderful tension, a trinity of discipleship:

Healing, work, and rest.

In two sentences you see that tension at work: Simon's unnamed mother-in-law, resting in bed with a fever, being healed, working. In three paragraphs, you see that tension at work: Jesus healing, first his friend's mother-in-law, then the line of people gathered around the door.

Then rest, early in the morning, before the sun had even risen finding a quiet place to pray, a quiet place, not just away from the demands of strangers, but even away from his friends.

And finally, work, setting out that Sunday morning to proclaim the message of God's justice.
"For that," he tells his disciples, "is what I came out to do."

Healing, work, and rest.

Mark doesn't give us a complex solution to balance this trinity -- he just points to them, letting us know that all three were critical to Jesus' ministry, critical to discipleship, critical to following in this Way:

Healing, work, and rest.

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I doubt that I'm the only one here this morning that has gotten these three out of balance – I cannot work unless I am rested and healed, I cannot heal unless I am rested, but the healing is not for it's own end, but to make the work of God, and to make rest, possible.

I need to rest and pray in order to work and heal, yes, but sometimes the only way I can rest is to work myself into tiredness.

Healing, work, and rest.

And yet, we are children of Grace, without firm control of our circumstances, our lives. So much is not in our control, will never be in our control.

Jesus had to work to find time to rest, and more often than not folks found him and set him back to work earlier than he might have liked.

Healing, work, and rest.

We don't always get it right – there isn't a strict proportion, like good compost, good soil, different seasons call for different mixtures. We just have remember that we need all three, and we ask for all three from God: The healing of God's wholeness, vision to see, and strength to do, the work set before us and a peaceful night and a perfect end.

Healing, work, and rest.

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