

Mark 1: 29-39

In our service last Sunday – in the Gospel and the sermon – we talked about the healing power of the Holy Spirit – the experience of healing and wholeness that opens doors within our hearts and minds. (A journey that carries us forward – from wholeness to holiness.)

I think it's probably fair to say that the people of Western Australia have been on a bit of journey in this week. We've just come out of a statewide lockdown – during this last week, we've experienced times of isolation and uncertainty. For some it's been an anxious time – for struggling business owners and people working in our hospitals and schools.

And, of course, we've also had several bushfires to contend with, as well. According to the update that I read yesterday, 81 homes have now been destroyed in the suburbs north of Perth, along with 10000 hectares of native bushland. People have lost homes and property and livestock. And, for these people, to path to healing and wholeness will take some time.

With this very challenging week now behind us, today I'd like to begin by reminding you that healing and wholeness are made possible by the grace of God – the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the hope that we carry with us in times of difficulty and doubt. Healing and wholeness are gifted to us, through the grace of God. And, I think we see something of this in our Gospel – in the story concerning the healing of Simon's mother in law (she needs help).

In the words of our Gospel, "...as soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew... Simon's mother in law was in bed with a fever... Jesus came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them..."

When I listen to the story, I can almost see the suffering of Simon's mother-in-law, I can see her physical suffering and I can see her spiritual suffering. According to our story, Simon's mother-in-law is bedridden by a terrible fever. (And, I can imagine what that might look like.) I can see the loss of mobility – she can't get up or move around (a bit like us, during this last week). I can see the loss of human contact – she's isolated (much like us). She is a sick woman who is slowly losing her sense of purpose. (If you've ever cared for the sick and the elderly you might know what this looks like.)

Through this fever, Simon's mother in law was denied the life that God intended for her.

And, in a way, I think this story can become our story – it can become the story of our suffering. It can become the story of suffering that we see in the world around us – in stories about people (families) who have lost their homes and their property – in stories concerning the sick and the elderly and the dying

At times, this story of suffering (that we experience and see in the world around us) can become so powerful – so overwhelming, that we lose sight of God's grace. Through the experience of suffering, we can feel disconnected from God (does this sound familiar?)

Imagine, if you can, what life might be like in the third world (in the South Sudan and Somalia and Yemen – those places that we often pray for in our intercessions) – places where men and women and children bedridden by disease. Imagine, if you can, the fever of hunger or the sickness of unending sadness.

Imagine, if you can, what life might be like in the war-torn parts of the world – the fever of broken homes and broken bodies. Imagine living in a place of constant violence and unending fear.

And yes, I think there are signs of profound suffering here – in our own country. (Among the poor – a fever of poverty and neglect and loss. Among the wealthy – a different sickness – a sickness of self-indulgence and blindness.)

Yes, this reading is appropriate for us because we live in a world where many are bedridden by fever – not just physical illness, but also a sickness of the heart and mind – a fever that can separate us from the love of God. And, I suspect many have experienced this terrible sickness during this last week.

But, as our story tells us, the love of God is constant – the grace of God can reach us, often in unexpected places – at unexpected times.

According to our story, Jesus reaches out to Simon's mother in law, takes her by the hand and lifts her up (this is the power of grace – the work of the Holy Spirit).

This broken woman is restored to health – touched and made well by someone who cares. And, of course, Simon's mother in law then becomes infected with this love – the love that Jesus shares. The restored woman rises from her bed

and begins to serve. (Again. this is a response prompted by genuine love and gratitude.)

Again, in the words of psalm 147 that we heard last week, ‘...he heals the broken in spirit and binds up their wounds...’

I think we’re encouraged to make this same journey - in response to the experience of grace, we follow – we rise above our sickness and serve, as a blessing to others (money for the poor, friendship for the lonely, food for the hungry and clothes for the naked).

In our service to others, we offer service to God. In the words of Matthew 25, verse 40 – when we do these things for the least in God’s family, we do them for God. Put another way, today we are reminded that gratitude is not enough – a simple thankyou will not be sufficient. The power of our reading today comes with the recognition that Simon’s mother-in-law is transformed – she is willing to serve in love and gratitude.

Surely, this is the healing that God offers to the world, through the lives of those touched by his grace. This is the transformation that is offered to us. Surely, we are all called to respond to these blessings, each in our own way. I pray that the words of Isaiah, from our first reading this morning, will become the experience of grace that stirs us into action – that those who wait for the Lord shall see their strength renewed – that they shall rise up with wings like eagles.

If you would like to make a donation to those affected by the recent bushfires north of Perth, you can do so by accessing the diocesan website and following the links to The Anglican Community Fund (online giving). We are also accepting donations today, which we will forward on to Church office (there is an offering bowl in the narthex, which you’ll see on your way out).

Archbishop’s Prayer:

*Lord Jesus Christ,
you brought calm to your friends in the midst of storms
and you give us courage in testing times.
Stay close to us through the challenges we face today;
the bushfires, the COVID lockdown,
and all the dangers and uncertainties around us.
In our communities, refresh the spirit of generosity.*

*Guide our leaders in government and community
to make wise decisions for the common good.
Strengthen the people who are on the frontline of care and services.
Confirm in each of us our commitment to love our neighbour as ourselves
so that we can live together in safety, goodwill and hope,
trusting the strength of your love. Amen.*

The Lord be with you.