

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday 2018

On leaving the synagogue

Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. Simon's mother-in-law whose name was Tabitha lay sick with a fever. her daughter, Deborah, the wife of Simon immediately told him about her.

He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up. Then the fever left her and she waited on them.

When it was evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons.

The whole town was gathered at the door.

He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons, not permitting them to speak because they knew him.

Rising very early before dawn, he left

and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed.

Simon and those who were with him pursued him and on finding him said, "Everyone is looking for you."

He told them, "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also.

For this purpose have I come."

So he went into their synagogues,

preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee.

Yes, I took some liberties with today's gospel giving names to Simon's wife and mother-in-law. As much as I love Mark's gospel, he's not very good at giving names to the women in his Gospel. Lots of male names but women, who play a significant role in his ministry and his mission, like the Canaanite women are not named. Other than a single, possibly cynical comment from his neighbors, "Is this not Mary's Son? No woman is named until the Crucifixion. The women stayed and all the male disciples deserted him and fled.

Don't names matter? Don't you want to know people's names? Do you know the name of the person sitting next to you? I used to be good at remembering names but as I've gotten older, not so.

Usually Mark describes a scene in detail as he does in most of today's gospel but the "raising" of Tabitha, the mother of Deborah and the mother-in-law of Peter is like a "throw away".

"He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up. Then the fever left her and she waited on them.

So we may "harrumph" and say "Nice, the poor woman has had the flu and as soon as Jesus heals her she has to wait on them!" But wait. To Mark's listeners these few words would speak volumes. As she is restored to herself, made whole by Jesus, she embodies Jesus' mission. Which is "diakonia". To wait on, to serve" Like Jesus himself who says "I came not to be served but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many"

So I don't want to fault Mark for not letting him hearers know the names of those he heals, especially women's names. Rather I want to thank Mark for giving us the most human picture of Jesus that we have in any of the Gospels. Today for example, Jesus is simply overwhelmed by all the pain and suffering he encounters. Whenever Jesus encounters another person in pain and touches them, "power" goes out of him. He heals at a cost to himself. Just this past week in the daily readings we heard of the woman with the hemorrhage whose name was Miriam ☺ who touched the cloak of Jesus and he "felt power go out of him". In today's Gospel Jesus is so drained, so exhausted by the suffering men and women he heals that he has to "get away from it all". He goes to a deserted place to pray in the hopes that Abba will give him the energy to face another day. (Know that feeling?) And can you imagine his reaction when Peter says to him "Everybody is looking for you" (Oy Vey!) But Jesus, always the one who serves, finds the energy to move on. Let's go to the other towns.

On this Super Sunday when most of the US will be reveling in the gladiatorial combat of Eagles and Patriots and watching commercials that cost 5 million dollars for 30 seconds (that's the cost of airing). While most of the US will be pretending that all is right with the world for a few hours, here we are this morning contemplating the "problem of pain" and the immense cost of human suffering" From Job's profound lament, having lost everything and not wanting to live any more to Jesus' encounter with suffering humanity, to the lines of

homeless outside waiting for the welcome table to open, human pain and suffering is everywhere.

And when there is a face and a name of the person who is bearing the burden, carrying the cross, it can be even more overwhelming. I met Job yesterday. Her name is Alejandra. She is a young Venezuelan woman who is here in the US seeking asylum. She was trained as a lawyer in Venezuela but had to flee because of threats to her life since she was helping those protesting the government. Like Job, she has lost everything. Her country, her career and now she is working two restaurant jobs to pay rent and is being treated like a “slave”, a “servant”, a non-person. Her mother who was able to come and visit her told me about her son, Alejandra’s brother who is in the University and has joined the protests and she can not stop crying because she is worried for his safety.

When there is a face and a name and story, it is difficult not to want to help, to embody the compassion of Jesus. Because none of this makes any sense. How can there be such pain and suffering in a world created by a God whom we say is love.

I’m sure you know of C.S. Lewis the great Christian writer, University professor, author of the Chronicles of Narnia and other works. In 1993 there was a film called *Shadowlands* that focused on Lewis own struggle with “making sense “ of human suffering. Early on in the film he says that “pain is God’s megaphone to awaken a sleeping humanity to consciousness of him. Like a sculpture, he chips away at us until we become perfection in his eyes.” And Lewis is convinced of this explanation until he falls in love, until he is Surprised by Joy. For the first time in his life he falls in love with a Jewish, divorced woman who surprises him with a love that he has never known. She is soon diagnosed with cancer and suddenly Lewis, like Job is “inside the pain and loss” and not “outside”. He is inside the anger and rage at God or whatever is taking away the one he loves. He can no longer find a “reason”, a “purpose” for suffering”. All he can do is love and not count the cost. As Joy says to him, “the happiness of now is part of the pain that will be”

And so if you are despairing like Job of your personal suffering or simply drained by the suffering of others whom you know and love, or

just simply overwhelmed by the problem of pain that is all around us, will you simply love, simply serve, simply be the compassion of God for others? And remember Tabitha, the mother of Deborah, the mother-in-law of Simon ☺