

Had I truly known what the essence of this sermon was to be, I would have titled it “Seasons of Life”. At least for me, sermons evolve over time and it’s terribly hard to know on Tuesday what the sermon for Sunday is going to be about. So imagine, if you will, that I’m going to glean from this text something about the seasons of life.

I see here four seasons of life within these few verses of Mark. The first is healing; we all know that sometime in our life there will come a time when we need to be healed. Simon’s mother-in-law needed to be healed. Jesus and his friends had just left the synagogue where he’d made quite a stir healing and exorcising demons, and they come to the house of Simon. Jesus has moved from the public domain of worship (the synagogue) to the private domain of Simon’s home. Both public and private places are important to Jesus. He cares about the neighborhood as well as the individuals within those neighborhoods. Jesus’ presence and his touch *lift* this woman from fever to health.

Touch can be profoundly healing, and the absence of touch can be painful. I’m afraid you may be subjected to sermon illustrations from my experiences of the last few months, and I hope that they are helpful to you and not self-serving. For instance, while Tom was hospitalized, there were some days when I was told to not even sit on his bed, and the whole two weeks we were there, I had to wear gloves day and night. When I finally was able to be beside him, the touch was healing to both of us. Never take for granted the healing power of touch.

After worship today I’m not going to do my usual hugging because after being sick last week, I want to “play it safe.” I’ll understand if you want to wait a week to even shake hands. I suppose there are multiple ways metaphorically to touch another person like to touch someone with ones eyes; but the point is Jesus, the one who gives us insight into health and wholeness, believed in healing touch; he even made house calls.

Like Simon’s mother-in-law there are seasons of life during which we need to be healed. We may suffer physically or we may be soul sufferers. Because healing was such an important part of Jesus’ ministry, I imagine he would have some opinions about health care today. I imagine he’d want everyone to have the healing touch of today’s healers.

Another season of life that is briefly mentioned here is Simon’s mother-in-law (oh, how I wish she were named) response to being healed by serving Jesus. It becomes her season of service arising out of the gratitude of her heart. Now she is well. We serve because we have been served by the Holy One. It is from the depths of gratitude that we offer our gifts to the world. There’s a season to receive and be healed followed by a season of service and gratitude. Service is a natural response to a life that has been blessed. After Jesus is served and his strength renewed, the multitudes come to him and he continues to heal them.

But then there is a third season of life represented as Jesus retreats to pray. Now I have been humbled by having had the shingles. I am puzzled as to why I got them 2 weeks ago. People tell me they are stressed induced, but why then didn’t I get them in the fall when Tom was having chemo, or in December when we were in the hospital, or in January when Allison called at 3:30 in the morning from West Texas to say she was alright and the car was alright, but she almost hit a deer in the road.

Why didn’t I get sick during a myriad of other times when I knew I was truly stressed. Perhaps the stress was simply cumulative and I’d reached the saturation point and my body acted

out. I think now I've got the message; there's a time to retreat and pray and if we don't do it voluntarily, we might be forced to do it.

Jesus after a pretty busy schedule of reaching out to people both in the public and private neighborhoods of Capernaum, Jesus knows it's time to go to *the source* for strength. We do well to recognize that life requires of us seasons set aside for contemplation and prayer.

The final season of life that I notice in this text is the time of life when we are focused on our purpose. The disciples interrupt Jesus' prayer time by hunting him down like a bunch of paparazzi. They say "everyone is searching for you. But Jesus says to them, "let's move on, so that I may proclaim the message I'm called to do." Jesus didn't delight in the drama of his popularity; he tells the demons to be silent and cease talking about him; he is focused and determined on what he is called to do.

These few verses contain short vignettes of larger seasons of life, seasons of healing, of service, of meditation, and times when we are focused and clear about what it is we are called to do. We learn from Jesus that all these seasons have importance. Jesus lived in a time of anxiety when people were obsessed with the precariousness of their lives. Though everything's relative, we can fairly easily find comparisons to life today. Here's four links from this text to our lives.

1) I hope and pray that healing will be freely given and received by everyone. Jesus' didn't check people's medical insurance before lifting them up. Tom received healing at City of Hope. It is an extraordinary place, a sacred place. But we didn't deserve more than anyone else to be able to be there and for Tom to receive healing there. Though we didn't pay for it, I noticed that just the tiny vials of medicine that I gave him in shots so that the transplant could happen, cost \$6000. If healing was so important to Jesus, it should be of top priority to us in our country today.

2) Service is the heart's response to blessing. There are many ways to serve, and Simon's mother-in-law models for us that a grateful heart is a heart of service. If we are grateful for our lives, for our neighborhood, for our church, for our country, for our world, then we do well to serve.

3) Today we live in a rat-race world. We can break out of what Walter Bruggemann calls "the box of production and consumption" through prayer and prioritization. I thought my priorities were fairly good, but since Tom got cancer, my priorities have become much better. Jesus' left the paparazzi and retreated to pray. We can leave the fast track and carve out time to renew our strength.

4) We are people with a purpose. Our focus is to be true to God's dream for the world. It is not a dream based on how much we can consume or how much we can buy. That model of economics has been found false. The other night on TV, I saw a recording of George Carlin's monologue on "stuff". Our world wants to seduce us into thinking that our worth is based on our "stuff".

But we need not give into that seduction that devalues who we are. We are children of the Creator, our worth is that we are loved by the One who calls all good things to life. We need not be slaves to the world's standard of living which can be stripped away instantly in one big ponzi scheme. We are worth more than that. We are people with a purpose, and it is our season of giving out of gratitude to the healing of the neighborhood and the well-being of the nations.

If we give ourselves to the purposes of the Divine One, then we probably won't have time or energy to get dragged down by the seductions of the world that wish to distract us from God's call upon us and those seductions are empty of meaning. Healing, service, prayer, and focus--all seasons of life to grasp hold of and in which to rejoice. AMEN