

MARK 2 EPIPHANY 5 MARK1: 29-39

As we are aware this year's Gospel is the one according to Mark. So, what's a gospel? The Greek word is *euangelion*. It means 'a good message'. It is a message about something that alters the climate in which people live. It changes the possibilities. If that's true, and I believe it is, how seriously do we take it?

Modern scholarship believes that our gospel was written by Mark in close consultation with Peter. Peter, preaching around the Mediterranean and in Rome, made use of his younger associate Mark, who noted what he said. Mark does not write as an eye witness, like John, but as a listener. It's possible that Mark came from a well connected family in Jerusalem who had trading contacts near and far. He writes in the Greek of the trading towns sometime c. 60AD.

One of the crucial things to note is that it is not the MIRACLES that drive the understanding of Mark's writing but the person, JESUS, around whom extraordinary things happen. Nowhere in Mark's gospel does Jesus claim that his ministry is about miracles. Mark is on about how these events changed the teller – Mark - and the hearer. To read Mark is to further probe the importance to him of the principal of RELATIONSHIP. Christianity or any religion is, to my mind, worthless unless there is relationship involved – with God and with each other.

Today's reading tells us about a family home where Jesus went to have a meal and a rest. It was Peter's house – called Simon before Jesus gave him another name. Andrew, his brother lived there too. James and John – all fishermen, were also there. HOSPITALITY is written in neon lights above this home – this is what makes a place for miracles to occur. You mean, in our kitchens, dining rooms and even bedrooms? YES.

Peter's mother-in-law was burning with a fever. One of the men told Jesus just how crook she was. Implied is the firsthand knowledge that Jesus could do something about it. They had all just come from the synagogue service in Capernaum. Jesus has been teaching there. Now he's faced with another real life needy situation. Will the message and the miracle fit? (Does our worship and work match?)

'Jesus came and took her by the hand and lifted her head from the pillow.' He gave her the helping hand of a servant. In Mark, serving is a sign of greatness. He raised her physically. Putting the message into practice, she immediately began to serve.' She was in her rightful place. Are we there in the house with them? Can we see that it is not simply the absence of disease but the restoration of strength.

And it's the Sabbath – the no cooking, no knitting day and Jesus is healing another. Tut tut, the church hierarchy won't approve. And it's a mother-in-law – so? First century society demanded that all members of the family be cared

for – rather like Naomi in the story of Ruth and Boaz. We all need caring for. The word ‘caring’ - DIAKONIA (diaconate) - that we read in verse 13 is the one used when Jesus needed to be tended in the wilderness. And there it was the angels who cared for the Son of God.

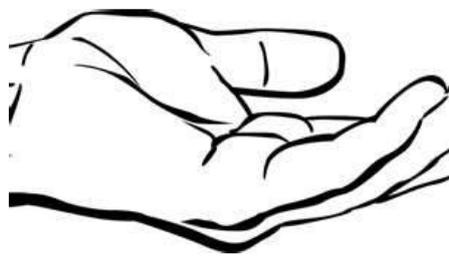
The lady in the centre of this story is described as Peter’s ‘in law’. What was the family responsibility in Judaism? The 10 commandments include ‘honouring one’s parents’ and both sets of parents are to be honoured. Well that takes care of that in-law stuff.

Is Simon’s mother-in-law the first female disciple? It’s certainly the first mention of pastoral ministry – ministry within the church itself. It is acknowledged that ‘not all can preach, but all can love and serve in some way.’

So how does Christ work in our everyday lives? God works outwards from the heart of our beings into the lives of others. God IS transforming the world, healing and forgiving.

And as we look at the rhythm of Jesus’ life in our gospel today we find that he goes from prayer to healing to rest, to prayer to more ministry. His whole life flows from prayer and rest to busyness and back again. As we breathe God in and rest in his love, we will find that we are healed from the inside out ready to serve our families, friends and beyond.

AMEN



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