

You may know well the scene in the Bible where Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they give various responses. Then he asks, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter in a moment of rare insight says, "You are the Messiah." But how about this variation: Who do you say that I am? And the disciples replies, "Master, thou art the supreme eschatological manifestation of omnipotent ecclesiastical authority, the absolute, divine sacerdotal monarch." And Jesus said, "What?"

That's a technically true statement, if you bother to figure it out, but it does remind us of the simplicity of life in Christ. In our gospel reading we have an important pairing of words in verse 31. They give us a simple and clear understanding of what it means to follow Christ. They are: raised up, and served.

The scene follows immediately after last week's gospel reading where we encountered Jesus reaching at the synagogue in Capernaum, the city which would become his home during his

public ministry. His teaching concludes with a dramatic exorcism of a demon possessed man. We then pick up in this week's gospel where Jesus has gone to the home of Simon, later to be renamed Peter. There we discover that Peter's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever. No details are given but it is probably safe to say this was more than just a common cold. That brings us to our two simple words in verse 31. Jesus goes to her, takes her by the hand and raises her up. "Raises" her up is the exact same word used at the empty tomb to describe Jesus being raised from the dead. Now this is not a resurrection here, but I think we are to make connections. In the next moment we learn that the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

Now if you are like me, and hopefully you're not this cynical when reading a scene like this, but if you are like me you're immediate thought is, "Jesus just healed this woman so she could make him his lunch. This isn't much of a healing. Jesus just wants a peanut butter sandwich and it's easier to heal her and have her do it than to make it himself." I know that's a totally silly interpretation but it has been an interpretation of the text by some. They say that this is patriarchy at its worst; that she is only healed in order to return to her role of servitude to men.

I think that is a wrong interpretation, but it does bring us to a deeper understanding of the text. Mark uses the word "raised up" many times in the gospel, not just here and at the resurrection. It is used to refer to new strength coming to those who have been brought down by illness, injury or even death. These people are able to rise again and return to their full place in the world. To be raised up is to be restored to wholeness, not just health.

Sarah Henrick, professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary notes this, **"It was her calling and her honor to show hospitality to guests in her home. Cut off from that role by an illness cut her off from doing that which integrated her into her world. Who was she when no longer able to engage in her calling? Jesus restored her to her social world and brought her back to a life of value by freeing her from that fever. It is very important to see that healing is about restoration to community and restoration of a calling, a role as well as restoration to life. For life without community and calling is bleak indeed."** (Working Preacher for 2/5/2012)

When God heals it isn't just for taking away the hurts. It is to bring restoration. That brings us to the second key word - service. You know well the line that you are saved by grace and not works. But of course you were not saved by God's grace to be lazy or exploitative. No, you were saved by God's

gracious love, and when love is given and received love brings about an engaging response. You are raised up and restored, and your response to that is good works.

“Good works” may make us feel uncomfortable on many levels. If nothing else we imagine great sacrifices of our comforts and joys in order to help the less deserving. We imagine soup kitchens and hurting people. But let’s not forget the real point of good works.

I think most of our good works are not so much the extraordinary things that we do, but the mindset with which we do everything. Martin Luther said the shoemaker should make his shoes for the Lord. Or if you’re a plumber or a janitor you do your work to the glory of God. That will prevent you from doing shoddy work or taking advantage of anyone.

See what you do - everything you do as a calling from God - and let that give perspective to what you are doing. I don’t care if it is something that feels holy like reading the scripture lessons on a Sunday morning, or something that feels all to routine like driving your kids to a sporting event. See everything as a calling from God. And if it doesn’t feel like that, then seriously ask yourself why you’re doing it.

The presence of Christ -the raising up and service he provides- in your life should be alive always.

I like the cute little story about the new pastor in England who went to call on his parishioners. He knocked on the door of the first house he came to in the little village. A kind-faced lady opened the door. He introduced himself as the new pastor and then asked, "Does Jesus live here?" "What was that?" came the startled reply. "Does Jesus live here?" the young minister repeated. After the parson had left, the lady rushed out into the backyard where her husband was tending his roses. "Frank!" she shouted, "the new parson was just here and he's daft! Just plain loony!" "What do you mean?" her husband asked. "Well, all he did was just stand there staring me straight in the eye and repeating again and again the question, 'Does Jesus live here?' I finally had to shut the door in his face." "Why didn't you answer him and tell him we have always been good reliable members of the church? We attend services every Sabbath and contribute generously to every cause of the Lord's work." The wife stood for a moment remembering the look in the parson's eyes as he asked the question, and then suddenly it dawned on

her what he had really been asking. She turned to her husband, and in the slow, deliberate voice of one who had suddenly seen a vision, she said, "But, Frank, that was not what he was asking."

It isn't a funny story, but you get the point. Did the presence of Christ dwell in their household - not in their outward charitable giving or worship attendance - but in their minute by minute day to day lives?

You have the promise of resurrection to look forward to. You are raised to serve. May you find wholeness in your life from our Lord's touch just as Peter's mother-in-law did. May you be raised up every time you feel pushed down. And may you serve in response to a feeling of God's abundant providence in your life. Amen