

Kerry Mansir  
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Christ Church Gardiner  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be always pleasing to you, O God, our strength and our redeemer.

Today's Gospel picks up where we left off last week. Jesus was in the synagogue on the Sabbath teaching, and he freed a man from an unclean spirit, his first exorcism in Mark's Gospel. After leaving the synagogue, Jesus entered the house of the brothers, Simon and Andrew. There he found Simon's mother-in-law in bed with a fever. We don't know any more about her ailment, but it was serious enough for the family and Jesus to be concerned. So when Jesus heard about her condition, he came to her room and took her by the hand and lifted her up. And in that moment, the fever left her and she began to serve Jesus and the others.

We might wonder why Mark tells the story in this way. Why is it important that after Simon's mother-in-law is healed, she begins to serve them? Could they not serve themselves and give her a break—this poor woman that has been stuck in bed with a fever?

But there's more going on here than just needing her to be well so that she could serve the household. Our translation of this text uses the phrase, "lifted her up," when Jesus heals her. But the Greek is translated elsewhere as "raised up." So this encounter between Jesus and Simon's mother-in-law has this suggestion of resurrection. Where she had been sick and stuck in bed, *after* Jesus' healing, she is raised to a resurrected life. This interpretation is strengthened by what she does next. She began to serve them. "To serve" which is the translation of the Greek word, "diakoneo." That's where we get our word deacon—those who serve and minister. And this kind of service isn't limited to household chores, though that kind of serving has its place. It has a stronger meaning of discipleship. Simon's mother, through the healing of Jesus, is restored to serve—restored to her discipleship.

Too often, when we think of resurrection, we limit our understanding of it to overcoming the death of our mortal bodies. But the power of resurrection is not only found in that moment when the women at the tomb realize that Jesus rose from the dead after he was crucified. There's more to it than that. Resurrection moments can happen throughout our lives. Moments when, like Simon's mother-in-law, we are touched by Jesus, touched by love in all its power, and restored to our discipleship. When we are given the choice to respond to Jesus' touch by rising and doing life differently.

Yesterday afternoon we had a funeral in the churchyard. I officiated but regrettably, I had barely known Charlie, only having shared a couple of phone conversations and met in person once or twice during my time here at Christ Church. But while listening to the

remembrances that were shared by his family and friends, I found myself wishing that I *had* known him and had the joy of his friendship that was so apparent in those present to grieve his death. Their stories painted a picture of a man who loved deeply and expressively. Who modeled care and compassion for others. Who knew how to laugh. Who enjoyed life fully even when things didn't go exactly as planned. His grandchildren used the phrase perfectly imperfect to describe him. But I also heard in these stories about Charlie, that he had made a choice more than forty years ago that profoundly changed him. He had chosen sobriety, and that choice had fundamentally changed the shape of his life.

I believe this must have been a resurrection moment in Charlie's life. A responding to the power of God's love and being restored to serve and love those around him more fully. How would his relationships have been different had he not had that resurrection moment? What joy and love might he and they have missed out on?

We will *all* have these moments in our lives when God calls us and reaches out to us in love to lift us up. Just like Charlie and just like Simon's mother-in-law. Maybe you have already experienced a resurrection moment. Perhaps you have experienced a crisis that broke something open in you and changed how you live. And if we haven't been broken open like that yet, how will we respond when we are? Will we allow those experiences to become resurrection moments for us? Do we believe that the love of Christ can bring light and new life even to our darkest days and shattered dreams?

In just ten days, we will enter into the season of Lent. On Ash Wednesday, we'll reflect upon our mortality as the ashes are imposed and we hear or say the words, "remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." Believing in resurrection moments does not mean that we deny the reality that death will come to us all. Our mortal bodies will fail us at some point. And even while we proclaim that "in death, life is changed, not ended," and that "nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God," we all have to come to terms with what mortality means. During the season of Lent, I invite you to join our Wednesday discussions on Zoom where we will be thinking about that mortality—our death and dying. But this week, I want us to think about who we are today and what it would mean for us to live a life shaped by resurrection moments. How can we open ourselves to the outstretched hand of Christ who desires to lift us up and make us whole, restoring us to our discipleship and our relationships? Amen.