

Sunday, February 4, 2018

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Epiphany 5B  
180204

### **Healing of an Old Lady**

Did you hear about the young wife who put her arms around her husband and said, “Hey Sugar, I have some news. Pretty soon, we’re going to be three in this house instead of two.” Her husband got all teary eyed and was just glowing. “Oh darling,” he said, “ I am so happy.”

And the young wife said, “My Mom will be happy too, ‘cause she’s moving in with us this weekend!”

Well the only reason that story is funny is because YOU are prejudiced against mothers in law. And that makes me a little bit upset because I personally just became a mother in law a few months ago for the very first time. And I’m sure MY eldest son and his new wife would just love my coming and living with them in their small apartment – - or maybe not.

Actually, you should all know that the Bible is very mother-in-law *friendly*. One of the most beautiful & enduring love stories in the world is the bible story about the sparkling friendship between a young woman named Ruth and her sassy old mother-in-law, Naomi.

Throughout most of time and history, though, not only mothers in law but older women in general, have not always been cherished by society or even by their families.

This dis-missing of widows, divorcees and older women has taken extreme forms in some cultures –

You may have heard of the custom of

“Sati” – a centuries old – rare but real -- practice in India – where new widows were “encouraged” to show their wifely devotion to their husbands by being burnt death on their husband’s funeral pyre.

(I am a devoted wife, but not that devoted!)

This practice of “sati” is illegal now, but still occasionally happens.

In Saudi Arabia, you’ve heard of women who need a male “guardian” to go with them anytime they go out in public... this has meant that a mature woman, who is widowed or divorced might sometimes need to ask her teenage son or nephew for permission to go anywhere outside of her home compound.

Not as extreme an example, but even among Christians,

As part of Wayne’s and my work with Global Mission - I was once invited to Sunday dinner at the home of a bishop of one of the churches in Myanmar - I was briefly introduced to the bishop’s wife who was bustling around in the kitchen, the smell of S/E Asian spices was heavenly - I looked forward to talking with this woman at dinner, but when it came time to sit down, the bishop’s wife stayed in the kitchen. “Won’t your wife come sit with us?” I asked the bishop. “Oh no, she never eats with guests – she will eat later, after she has served us.”

In the Gospel story today, things play out very differently.

Jesus serves the old lady- FIRST  
Before she serves him.

It’s his first healing.

I love the fact that in the New Testament, Jesus’ first non-healing *miracle* is a practical one – there’s a wedding, the wine jugs are empty, and Jesus makes wine.

In our world today Jesus gives life-giving wine to millions of people through churches around the world ... but before he gave wine to many, Jesus gave wine to one specific wedding party because, they had a practical need, and he filled it...

In today’s Gospel story, Mark chapter 1, we hear about the first *healing* miracle of Jesus.

The context -- as we heard last week – is that Jesus has done an exorcism at the synogogue... “Be quiet” he said to that possessed man, do you remember this from last Sunday? We are all possessed by something, Pastor Wayne reminded us, and in Mark 1 verse 25 Jesus says “be quiet , and the evil spirit leaves the man.

That was a big public event in the synogogue!

Now, (Mark 1:29) Jesus goes from the public religious sphere – where typically the men are in charge – and he’s invited over for Sabbath dinner at the family compound of two of his disciples, -- some biblical scholars think Simon Peter and Andrews’ home was practically next door to the synogogue – a distance about the same as walking from our sanctuary over to the fellowship hall --

From the beginning, Christian church life involves getting together, with Jesus and friends, eating, drinking, talking, enjoying each other’s company.

So anytime any of you get together outside of church: eating, drinking, enjoying each other’s company – you can consider this part of your Christian devotional practice ! 😊

So Jesus enters the home of Simon Peter and Andrew – people lived in big extended families in those days – and Simon’s mother-in-law is in bed with a fever.

Now in those days a fever was more dangerous than today in age of antibiotics... having a fever then meant you were going through the valley of the shadow of death... nobody knew whether you would recover or not...

let me ask you a question.

Even today, what factors influence whether you recover from a fever or not?

A researcher from Brigham Young University did a long term study of 10,000 middle aged people. She was asking the question, *What factors reduce the chance of dying?*

She looked at the typical “risk factors” like diet, smoking, environment....

And – happily for me and some of the rest of us, she discovered that being

overweight is only #8 on the list. (Looks like I can have an extra pancake at the Mardis Gras Fellowship dinner next week!)

Getting a regular Flu vaccine was #6 on the list-- that was a surprise to me...

Quit smoking was only #3 on the list.

The top 2 factors for living a long life?

#2 on the list was close relationships –are their people in your life who would loan you a few bucks, help you fix your car, or go with you to the doctor? and #1 on the list is social integration: that simply means, how many people do you interact with during your day – whether it’s just the cashier at Walmart or the usher at church, your golfing or gaming buddies -- or your small group Sunday School or Bible class – interacting with others – even just a little chit-chat - is the #1 best thing you can do for your physical health!

When you’re inviting your friends to church, you can tell them this: top two factors for longevity are #2 close relationships and #1 simple social interaction. Guess where you can get both of those things, and meet Jesus too! Yup, right here at Trinity Lutheran Church.

So in the Bible today Jesus comes over to the disciples’ house. Peter’s mother in law is obviously well integrated socially, because as soon as Jesus enters the house -

Everybody there tells him about Mom and her fever.

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Pastor Wayne and I have started our first weeks as your pastors at Trinity by starting to get to know you and we hope to visit every member in your homes or at church or at lunch within the first nine months of this year.

Now neither of us is Jesus (in case you haven’t figured that out yet!) and no miracles of healing have taken place that I know of, (just yet!) but do you see how what we do in the church is part of Jesus’ healing of the world? The aging and the frail and the sick are at the heart of the Christian community. The “non- hot demographic” -- the old, sick mother-in-law -- that’s who Jesus starts his ministry with, and that’s who is at the heart of the church life of Trinity.

Pastor Wayne and I don't want to – can't!! -- do this all by ourselves, and we look forward to re-booting the Trinity lay visitation teams, so *more* of you all get to share in Jesus ministry with mothers in law and fathers in law and widows, the imprisoned and the possessed, the sick and the lonely and the stressed... together we get to be agents of God's health and healing... and remember, Jesus heals many, but before Jesus heals many, he starts by healing – lifting up - one old lady.

And participating in the healing of the world is already part of the DNA of this church. One person we visited mentioned how it was people from Trinity church who built her a ramp so she could better get in the door with her walker;

Another couple told about the Trinity member who installed safety rails in their shower.

A completely bed-ridden Trinity member said it was a someone from this church who used to bring her communion, once a month.

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Today in Mark chapter 1, Jesus goes to an old lady with a fever.  
2. He takes her hand. 3. He helps her up to her feet.

Jesus first serves her, and *then* she serves him.

And from that healing of one old lady,

The circle expands, and the ministry grows.

We at Trinity Lutheran Church Las Cruces get to be part of that expanding circle of healing,

Beginning with the "least important" among us,

And expanding to serve wider circles of Las Cruces, New Mexico, North America, and unto the ends of the earth

Until – because of Jesus who *first* comes to *us*...

we ourselves are at long last lifted up

beyond the boundaries of space and time

into God's eternal Life. Amen.