

Homily Feb 4 2024 Teresa Elder Hanlon

Job 5: 9-11, 16, 18, 27; Psalm 147; 1 Corinthians 9:1-6; Mark 1:29-31

Silence. I share with you a dramatized version of the gospel story¹, not because it is an accurate telling of this scripture—it is not— nor is this TV series “the Chosen” free of the stereotypes and Christianized errors about first century Jews, but what this video does show is some of the emotion that occurs when someone is seriously ill. This is the scenario in today’s gospel with Simon Peter’s Mother-in-law. I invite you to monitor your own emotions and reactions as you note the facial expressions and body language.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZhUwOhP6a8>

What I noticed in this enactment was the fear and helplessness of the family members turned to delight and laughter. Fear of this illness, fear of death seen in the eyes of Eden, the woman’s daughter. And how her fear turned to gratitude. And second, among the family group, a feeling of helplessness to do anything.

Being scared *is* a part of what it is to be human. We are rooted in the need to survive whether that results in fight or flight or tend and befriend. Fear is one of the feelings that is challenged by the presence Holy Spirit. What the person of Jesus introduces here is a calm. Job tells us the Jewish tradition is one of healing. “For we are wounded, but the Holy One binds us up, we know injury, but Sophia’s hands heal.” When Jesus walks in on Eden, crying, He carries in his being a connection with the Source of all Life. This prayerful connection is what heals and consoles.

However, in the actual scripture passage, the family appeals to Jesus to do something. They are not as clueless as the drama makes out. They trust in their friend, the one who *Sets Free*. They have witnessed Jesus’ power of exorcism earlier in the day in the synagogue. Now, they are in the domestic church, the brothers’ home, as Brendan Byrne² reminds us. If I were directing, and my sense of Jesus determined the action, I would have them gather round the bed, closer in, perhaps all touch their loved one in some way even as he takes her hand.

What’s happening in this particular take on the gospel is that the director is imposing limitations on the actors’ agency in order to raise the profile of Jesus. Yes, Jesus is God, but Jeshua,

¹ *The Chosen* “Jesus healing Simon’s mother-in-law”. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZhUwOhP6a8>

² Brendan Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark’s Gospe*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 2008), 46-47.

this man of 2 thousand years ago, called others to be *with* him. They are together in the room and Jesus leads the prayer in the context of their faith and support.

The director may be telling the story from a theology of the common person's inadequacy—as though helpless observers. Rather, Jesus responds to their trust in him and, I suggest, their presence is part of the healing atmosphere.

There's something going on with this production which disturbs me. When those in charge, like the director of this scene impose their perspective and bias on the action, characters in the room with Jesus are disempowered. This first healing in Mark's gospel takes place in a home where Jesus is invited in. More than onlookers, they are members of the house church. Simon's mother-in-law ministers or *diakonaes* to them – this verb is the same one used for Paul and other apostles (some of whom are missing from the dramatized scene). *Diakonaes* is not limited to food in the kitchen.

So often, adults in charge limit those under their care—whether a parent inhibiting a child, or colonial powers controlling the actions of those they've overpowered. I'll share another quick story on video that illustrates this – it fits with both Black History month and Aboriginal storytelling month. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nwk0F-DzjLs&t=234s> to 2:23; and 8:00-9:00 UC pastor Charmaine Bailey (exploring Mark 1: 29-39).

The rules restricting interaction between ten or so First Nations and Black troops during the building of the Alaska highway, limited the well-being of everyone concerned. In times of fear in our lives, or duress can we, like Simon Peter, his family and friends, invite Jesus, invite the Spirit—though we cannot foresee or understand what might happen? Can we let go of a know-it-all attitude, breath deep and invite the Spirit of Jesus to work in and through us? Claim our agency as believers? The black troops made it because of their ingenuity and their song that acted as an opening for the Spirit to join them. How do you invite peace and healing?

QUESTIONS: What did you hear/see today? What are you afraid of? When have you (had to) let go in trust or invite Christ to act?