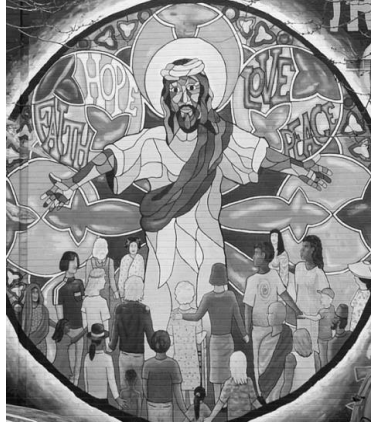


JESUS HEALED A MOTHER-IN-LAW!



Scripture:

Psalm 147:1-11

¹Praise the LORD! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting. ²The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. ³He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds. ⁴He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. ⁵Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. ⁶The LORD lifts up the downtrodden; he casts the wicked to the ground. ⁷Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre. ⁸He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, makes grass grow on the hills. ⁹He gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry. ¹⁰His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner; ¹¹but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

The second scripture reading is Mark 1:29-39. It is helpful to put this passage on a timeline for the ministry of Jesus; he is first described in the book of Mark as a grown man being baptized in the Jordan River by John. There is no nativity story in the book of Mark which is the shortest of the four gospels.

After his baptism, Jesus went out into the wilderness for forty days to prepare for his ministry. When he returned, Jesus immediately began recruiting his disciples. He started with John and James, then Simon Peter and Andrew, all from the towns near the Sea of Galilee.

They follow Jesus into the synagogue where he teaches and astounds his listeners with his teachings and healing of a man who was known to have an illness that seemed like a demon causing his convulsions. Now just before today's reading, the news has spread about the amazing Rabbi Jesus and throngs of people are clamoring to be healed.

Mark 1:29-39

²⁹As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³²That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

³⁵In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." ³⁸He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." ³⁹And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



JESUS HEALED A MOTHER-IN-LAW

I learned something new this week. Do you know what the punishment is for bigamy? (That's where you are married to two different people, which is illegal in this country.) The punishment? Two mothers-in-law!

I learned something else this week. Now that I am a mother-in-law, the jokes about mothers-in-law are not as funny as they used to be!

Mothers-in-law often get a bad rap. And now that I am one, that seems very unfair! Isn't it interesting that it takes walking in a person's shoes to know the pain of what it feels like to be discriminated against, made fun of or joked about. (I think that is true with any form of discrimination. Until you can put yourself in that person's place, you don't truly understand what it feels like and how deeply prejudice cuts.)

DIFFICULT FAMILY DYNAMICS

I don't know where our culture gets a negative idea about mothers-in-law. Maybe it is true in most cultures when two families come together, there can be difficult family dynamics. In the Old Testament, the book of Micah, Chapter 7 describes difficult family dynamics when it says: "For the son treats his father contemptuously, Daughter rises up against her mother, Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies are of his own household." That's quite negative isn't it!

MOTHERS-IN-LAW HAVE POSITIVE ROLES

Despite the sad commentary in the book of Micah about all family members, mothers-in-law have positive roles when they are described in two other parts of the Bible.

One is in the book of Ruth, where the mother-in-law, Naomi, is so wonderful and loving, Ruth vows to never leave her. Basically the whole Book of Ruth is about the relationship between Naomi and Ruth and how Ruth's faithfulness to Naomi helps them both.

The other mention of a mother-in-law in the Bible is in this Mark scripture for today. Here, Jesus reaches down and lifts up the mother-in-law of Simon with his hand. Then she immediately gets up and serves them.

Biblical scholars have noted two significant things about this healing of the mother-in-law. One is that it was taboo at that time for a Jewish man to touch a woman he was not married to or was not his immediate relative. The law is called Negiah, Hebrew for the word touch. Conservative Jewish law forbids physical contact with a member of the opposite sex.

So Jesus broke a huge taboo when he lifted the mother-in-law up by the hand and healed her.

The second note biblical scholars make is the fact that the mother-in-law serves them as soon as she is healed. They say it means that she likely became one of Jesus' disciples not just like a maid in the home. (Yes, Jesus had female disciples too even though they didn't make the top twelve list in the Bible.) And this mother-in-law's healing is so significant in the beginning of Christ's ministry that this story is repeated in Matthew and Luke as well. Three of the four gospels describe this healing story which shows its importance in the history of Jesus.

JESUS HEALED MANY

So why heal the mother-in-law? We can understand this action better by watching what Jesus does next. After healing many, it says Jesus takes a break to pray. Then in verse 40, Jesus heals someone with leprosy. His healing ministry, according to Mark, first began by healing a man with a "demon" (which today we understand that he was suffering from either a mental illness or a seizure disorder), then the mother-in-law with a fever is healed, and then a leper, a person suffering from leprosy. All three were untouchables.

Jesus healed many people, but he was especially famous for healing the people who were thought of as untouchable, expendable or easily disregarded.

Jesus not only cared about and healed them, but he often took the time to restore them to the community which gave them a renewed sense of purpose. After her healing, the mother-in-law was able to go back to doing what she was good at: being a gracious host to people visiting their home.

These first healings that Christ performed were of low status people who were being ignored by the high priests of the synagogue at that time. Jesus was making a religious political statement while teaching his disciples how these types of people

deserved respect and care equal with anyone else.

HEALED IN MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT

Jesus bravely and publicly touched those considered untouchable, and healed those who were not valued by society. He healed in body, mind, and spirit, providing wholeness for those who were in need of not just physical healing but also spiritual and psychological healing. He brought those considered to be outcast into his fold, too. Many of those he healed followed him and Jesus loved them the same as all the others so the surrounding community would see that they should do likewise.

Jesus continues to lift us up today and restores us to healthier living.

When we focus on following Jesus, we can be healers on Christ's behalf, looking at people with no discrimination in our hearts. Like Jesus, we are to see past skin color, immigration status, and economic status to the heart and soul of each person, doing all we can to help and love them as children of God.

LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO ME

In Mark 10, it is recorded that Jesus even lets little children come to him and sit on his lap when in those days, people regarded young children as pests, literally like rug rats.

His own disciples tried to keep the children away. Mark 10:14 reads, "But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.'"

In the Roman era, when Jesus walked on earth, it is estimated that nearly fifty per cent of the children died before age ten due to diseases and malnutrition. So Jesus broke through another custom in Roman society by showing love and respect to children.

JESUS LOVES ME

In 1860, Anna Warner reflected on Mark 10:14 and was amazed at the deep love Jesus had for children. In response she wrote one of the most beloved children's songs ever, "*Jesus Loves Me This I Know.*"

Do you know the history of that song? It was written by Anna Bartlett Warner. The lyrics first appeared as a poem that her sister included in a novel that she wrote in 1860. In her book, the words were spoken as a comforting poem to a dying child.

The tune was added in 1862 by William Bradbury. Along with his tune, Bradbury added his own chorus: "Yes, Jesus loves me, Yes, Jesus loves me..." After publication as a song it became one of the most popular Christian hymns in churches around the world, especially among children.

One-hundred-fifty-six years since the tune was added, we still sing this song:

Jesus loves me this I know
For the Bible tells me so,
Little ones to him belong,
They are weak but he is strong.

The next two verses from her poem are not as familiar. They are:

Jesus loves me—loves me still,
Though I'm very weak and ill; --
From his shining throne on high,
Comes to watch me where I lie.
Jesus loves me—he will stay,
Close beside me all the way.
Then his little child will take,
Up to heaven for his dear sake.

Anna Warner wrote this poem to peacefully reassure a child who was dying. That explains why the song has lasted so long and is so simply powerful for communicating God's love.

It is always fun to hear *Jesus Loves Me* sung in many languages. When I was in Kenya and in Haiti and in the Dominican Republic, I would always include this song in our singing with the kids. Whenever I sang it in English with orphans in all three countries, they already knew it and would immediately sing along in their own language whether it was in Swahili, Haitian Creole or Spanish. *Jesus Loves Me* is truly a universal love song.

Let's close by singing it together. You will find it on page #188 of your hymnal. You will notice that some of the words have been changed from the original poem.

Benediction:

**And may the grace of our Lord
Jesus Christ, the love of God and
the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be
with you now and forever more.
Amen**



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