

REFLECTION: Jesus the Healer

In today's scripture reading, people are lining up and waiting to see Jesus, a scene somewhat similar to scenes of people lining up to receive COVID-19 vaccines at immunizations centres.

Jesus and four of his 'students' have left the synagogue and gone to Simon's home. Simon's mother-in-law is confined to bed with a fever. Jesus takes her hand, helps her to stand and the fever leaves her.

Word of Jesus spreads. People begin gathering at Simon's house, bringing members of the community who cannot get there on their own – people who 'were sick with various diseases.' Jesus heals them! They arrive sick and diseased, they leave well and healed.

Biblical anthropologists refer to Jesus as a folk healer who probably used various 'folk' remedies and practices to help people.

For people of the Hebrew faith, a healer was an intermediary between the person who is ill and God. It is God who heals, through the person of a healer, in this case, Jesus.

People came so that, in the presence of Jesus, God will declare them to be well, and to restore them to their place in the community.

Today, those writing about healing often distinguish between disease and illness. A disease is a physical problem to be cured. Illness concerns the emotional and social impacts resulting from the disease – the meaning of one's life when one can no longer earn a living, no longer do things which have shaped how people see you and relate to you.

In Simon's house, Jesus the healer was changing the way people saw each other, and saw themselves, no longer as 'the diseased', the 'impure', the 'not-to-be-touched-or-associated-with', but as God's blessed, as honoured members of the community.

Those possessed with demons were also brought to Jesus. This is occurring in a land, occupied by Rome and the Roman military. Even today, people living in occupied, militarized lands, experience trauma and exhibit physical signs of being 'possessed' by this militarized spirit – they scream and convulse, or they are grow silent, or lethargic and paralyzed. They are alive but not living. They are living, but not alive.

Jesus will not let the demons speak because they know him. In that culture you did not publicly reveal your private self. Jesus would not allow the demons to reveal himself as the Holy One of God, and it was the demons who most clearly realized that Jesus was upending the rules, protocols, divisive labels and categories that existed between the well and the diseased. Jesus was casting out the Demon that separated and segregated people.

Like many Biblical stories this one sounds odd to us. It comes from a different time,

culture and place.

It may also sound odd to us because Jesus is creating a new story that, sadly, still seems new to us today.

People came to that house because something outside of their usual realm of experience was happening in that house. God was present in that house. God's presence of healing was present in that house.

Today we still have a world that separates the clean and the unclean, the acceptable and unacceptable, the welcome and the unwelcome, the included and the excluded, the entitled and the impoverished.

Jesus walks into our house as he walked into that first century house and interrupts our defined world, shuffles the definitions, and reassigns place-settings. Just when we think we have figured out that we can hate the sin and love the sinner, Jesus points out that when we actually apply that teaching to people we usually end up being much better at hating than at loving.

This Gospel story was written by someone who had chosen to follow Jesus. Following Jesus means becoming a source of newness in the world just as Jesus was a source of newness in his world.

It means that when we hear this story, we do not just desire Jesus to heal us of whatever dis-ease and divisions exist in our lives, but we choose to embody the Christ presence in the houses, buildings, streets, arenas, schools and stores that we enter.

The story tells us that people are to experience God's healing presence when we are present. People should not experience us one who judges, or ignores, or talks over others, or puts others down...we should be a healing presence ensuring people that they have been listened to, they have been heard, they have been cared about, they have mattered, they have been affirmed as an honoured member of the community, as a beloved child of God.

Let me conclude with a story Shane Clairborne tells in his book "The Irresistible Revolution." Clairborne is a member of the Simple Way community in Philadelphia. He tells of the day he and Michelle, another Simple Way member, went out to get a loaf of bread. Their walk took them through a nearby area known for prostitution and drug trafficking.

They walked past an alley, in which was a woman on crutches, wearing tattered clothes. She approached Clairborne and asked if he wanted her services. They hurried on to the store, got their bread, and on the way back nodded at the woman as they passed. However, when they got back to the Simple Way house, they discovered there was a rip in the side of the bag and the bread was bad. They had to go back to the store. As they passed the alley, they saw the woman, crying. After buying bread, on their way back, they again saw the woman crying. They felt that they couldn't just pass by. They talked to her, told her that they cared about her, that she was precious. They invited her back

to their home, a safe place where she could get warm and have something to eat. The woman got her crutches and went with them.

Quoting Claiborne, "As soon as we entered the house, she started weeping hysterically. Michelle held her as she wept. When she had gained her composure she said, "You all are Christians, aren't you?" Michelle and I looked at each other, startled. We had said nothing about God or Jesus, and our house doesn't have a cross in the window, a neon 'Jesus saves' sign, or even a little Christian fish on the wall. She said, 'I know you are Christians because you shine. I used to be in love with Jesus like that, and when I was, I shined like diamonds in the sky, like the stars. But it's a cold dark world and I lost my shine a little while back. I lost my shine on all those streets.' At that point, we were all weeping. She asked us to pray with her that she might shine again. We did; we prayed that that dark world would not take away our shine.

Days, week went by, and we did not see her. One day, there was a knock at the door and I opened it. On the steps there was a lovely lady with a contagious ear-to-ear smile. We stared at each other. We see a lot of people, so I was going to try to fake recognizing her, but she called my bluff and beat me to it. 'Of course you don't recognize me, because I'm shining again.' Then I knew. She went on to explain how deeply she had fallen in love with God again."

She again was both living and alive. In Jesus people discovered God's healing, they discovered that they regained their shine.

God shines through Jesus. Jesus invites us to allow God to shine through us, that we may be healers in our world, bearers of God's healing and that we might help people shine with God's love. AMEN

For reflection:

What do you think about the distinction made between 'disease' and 'illness'?

Have you ever experienced a time of healing that you could describe as being able to 'shine again'?

In what ways could you be a healer to others?