



Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time - 2006

Job 7: 1-7 1 Cor 9: 22-23 Mark 1: 29-39

Mark describes the ministry of Jesus in terms of a working day. It begins with the Word of God proclaimed and prayed. The rest of the day is spent in acts of healing.

What is striking about this first day is the lack of explicit messages. There are no pithy sayings about moral living, no exhortations to holiness, or promises of damnation so often part of some people's notions of evangelisation.

Preaching the reign of God is about doing saving acts, the mighty deeds of God, according to the first Testament.

The need for healing, both of body and spirit, is attested to in the reading from Job. Read the whole of Chapter 7. It is a powerful hymn to misery. Job is replying to one of his so-called comforters. His images of pain and restlessness are timeless.

"You say to yourself, I'll go to bed, at least I'll be a bit comfortable. Then you get terrible dreams, and you're worse off." v.13-14.

Ill-health is a powerful filter which colours our vision of life. We are full of admiration for those who live lives of abundance in the midst of pain or disability.

It is not difficult then, to see Jesus in the context of healing. Unfortunately the healing stories have often been presented as proofs of Jesus' divinity rather than pointing to the place where God is to be found. That is, in serving those whose lives and spirits are broken.

The Gospel is about what Jesus did so that we would understand what our role is, as his followers. For two thousand years, followers of *The Way* have comforted the sick, supported the dying, housed the homeless and latterly spent years poring over microscopes looking for ways of eradicating disease. The Christian motivation for the healing ministries is the same as that which motivates humanists, the intrinsic value of the human person, with the additional value that in so acting we attend to the unique "godness" of the other.

The story of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law provides the basic elements of a healing narrative.

The setting is Peter's home. The party of men has arrived for their Sabbath meal. The synagogue with its focus on the Word, was considered the domain of the men while the women's religious role was focussed on the table.

The second element is the bringing of the sick person to Jesus. The family informs Jesus of the mother's fever. In this culture it was appropriate that the men would bring this to Jesus' attention. Jesus "raises her up". The mention of the taking of her hand implies that touch, in the form of the laying on of hands, is often present in the healing stories. A transformation occurs. Finally the woman is enabled to continue her service of others.

Sometimes this story is told in too narrow a context, as if Jesus cured the woman so that she could get on with getting the lunch. All Gospel stories are about the church community. The woman is enabled to continue her pastoral ministry within the community. The two stories, vs 23-28, & 29-31 with their synagogue and home settings are about total ministry to the community.

Wellness, that is, spiritual wellness, is a prerequisite for ministry. This does not mean that only saints can minister. It means that if you are not free yourself you cannot free others. If, for example, you are "burning up" with unresolved angers you won't be able to listen to others. Attending to our selves, facing our own demons, will help us be more compassionate towards others.

As Job did not allow his terrible afflictions to separate him from God, so we pray for courage in the face of difficulties which may hinder our carrying out the work of the kingdom.

Patricia Stevenson rsj.