

## “Multi-tasking”

The Rev. Drew Willard  
UCC at The Villages, FL  
February 8th, 2015  
5th Sun. after Epiphany

Isaiah 40:21-31

Mark 1:29-39

*‘Now Simon’s mother-in-law lay sick with a fever,  
and immediately they told him of her.*

*And [Jesus] came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her;  
and she served them.’*

*Mark 1:30-31*

Let us pray... O God,

As we seek to serve you, may we not ask for less tasks,

but to find the resources and the strength to do what you have given us to do.

Amen

In our Gospel lesson today, we have an example of a kind of vignette –  
told in one or two verses, that paint a picture for us,  
that seems to be just randomly placed in the text.

Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law from a fever –  
then she got up and served everybody lunch!

What could this story possibly mean?

If taken literally, it could be used to justify the patriarchal view  
that women are subordinate, because *it’s in the Bible*.

As futile as that sounds, there are still people who think that way.

If taken critically, it could be scoffed at as an example of  
the backward-thinking of traditional societies, that would expect  
a woman to get up from her sick bed to fix dinner for the men.

Or if taken in an absolute sense, it could serve as an example for us all  
about being grateful in response for help in a time of desperate need.

The role of women was often affirmed by Jesus in ways that  
countered the chauvinistic attitudes of his time.

So, a more accurate interpretation of this text is that this is about  
someone who is transformed by God through Christ’s healing mercy,  
and motivated to serve others.

This story also tells us that Peter had a wife –

or at least we can say-with some degree of certainty -back then,  
that *his* spouse was a woman,

which since January 6<sup>th</sup> -here in Florida, would have to be clarified.

We never hear of Peter’s wife or of his mother-in-law again,  
which suggests that Christian discipleship was hard

on the families of those men who first answered the call to follow Christ.

Willard, p.2

At the same time this story suggests a stereotypical quality that women readily claim as unique and admirable about themselves – the practice of multi-tasking.

Peter's mother-in-law is like those women in our lives who can be sick and still manage things at home – like preparing meals, washing clothes, getting kids to school, and picking them up again.

I have seen that dynamic at work here in our church when it comes to organizing for special meals, bereavement, mission projects, and most recently our outreach to Wildwood Elementary School.

Just as multi-tasking is something we have come to expect of women – as what appears to be demonstrated by Peter's mother-in-law, multi-tasking seems to be something Jesus himself practiced as a generous healer for multitudes...

As it says in Mark 1:32-34

*[32] That evening, at sundown,  
they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.*

*[33] And the whole city was gathered together about the door.*

*[34] And he healed 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.*

The Gospel of Mark is believed to be the oldest Gospel and the Gospels of Matthew and Luke generally follow the sequence of events found in Mark.

However in Matthew and Luke,

Jesus then departs by boat to cross the sea

He lays down on a cushion in the back of the boat, and is so exhausted, that he sleeps during a storm.

In Mark 1:35 though, he gets up early in the morning and slips away without telling anyone to find a quiet place to be alone to pray.

*[35] And in the morning, a great while before day,  
he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed.*

Peter finds him and tells him everyone is searching for him.

Jesus responds by saying "Let's go", and they move on to visit other towns, where he continues a cycle of preaching, healing, and casting out evil spirits.

The difference between the multi-tasking of Jesus, however, and what I know of the multi-tasking women do, is that Jesus was able to get away for a break!

Willard, p.3

Those of you who have been mothers or worked with small children –  
you know who you are! Candidates for sainthood!  
For elementary school teachers, there is no coffeebreak in your day  
as you move through spelling, reading, arithmetic, and even lunch  
is no escape from the little ones.  
Men can manage, but women flourish in this role.

Even so, life can get complicated for both men & women,  
and being retired is no exception to this.  
Sometimes, we have all we can stand – up to our necks,  
and just hope there are no ripples...

At such times, all of us – men & women, can take a lesson from Christ's example  
by finding some sacred space in your day to get quiet inside.  
I remember reading in a devotional a long time ago  
that we shouldn't pray for God to take away such tasks before us,  
but to be given the strength and the smarts to deal with it all.

There is a marvelous devotional resource that I have mentioned before  
which I highly recommend, entitled, Jesus Calling, by Sarah Young  
Here is an examples of the wisdom expressed in these essays written  
in the format of Jesus speaking in the first person...

*I am above all things: your problems, your pain,  
and the swirling events in this everchanging world.  
When you behold My Face, you rise above circumstances  
and rest with Me in heavenly realms.  
This is the way of Peace, living in the Light of My Presence.  
I guarantee that you will always have problems in this life,  
but they must not be your focus.*

Prayerful reflection on these readings and the scriptural references they're based on,  
have been very helpful to me in maintaining my balance.  
Dependence on God for our focus, encouragement, and strength  
is reflected in today's lesson from Isaiah 40:30-31...  
[30] *Youths will become tired and weary, young men will certainly stumble;*  
[31] *but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength;  
they will fly up on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not be tired; they will walk and not be weary.*

Friends, as you have to multi-task in the course of your day,  
may you take the time to find that sacred space you need to be with God  
and keep your balance.

Amen

*Our lesson today from Isaiah 40:21-31, declares the limitless powers of God in contrast to the limitations of Creation.*

*In Isaiah, we see a transformation in how the Israelites in exile began to see God as not simply their tribal deity, but the Lord of the Universe...*

[21] Don't you know? Haven't you heard?

Wasn't it announced to you from the beginning?

Haven't you understood since the earth was founded?

[22] God inhabits the earth's horizon— its inhabitants are like locusts— stretches out the skies like a curtain and spreads it out like a tent for dwelling.

[23] God makes dignitaries useless and the earth's judges into nothing.

[24] Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely is their shoot rooted in the earth when God breathes on them, and they dry up; the windstorm carries them off like straw.

[25] So to whom will you compare me, and who is my equal? says the holy one.

[26] Look up at the sky and consider:

Who created these?

The one who brings out their attendants one by one, summoning each of them by name.

Because of God's great strength and mighty power, not one is missing.

[27] Why do you say, Jacob, and declare, Israel,

“My way is hidden from the Lord my God ignores my predicament”?

[28] Don't you know? Haven't you heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth.

He doesn't grow tired or weary.

His understanding is beyond human reach,

[29] giving power to the tired and reviving the exhausted.

[30] Youths will become tired and weary, young men will certainly stumble;

[31] but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength;

they will fly up on wings like eagles;

they will run and not be tired; they will walk and not be weary.

Mark 1:29-39

- [29] And immediately [Jesus] left the synagogue,  
and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.
- [30] Now Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever,  
and immediately they told him of her.
- [31] And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her;  
and she served them.
- [32] That evening, at sundown,  
they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.
- [33] And the whole city was gathered together about the door.  
[34] And he healed 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.
- [35] And in the morning, a great while before day,  
he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed.
- [36] And Simon and those who were with him pursued him,  
[37] and they found him and said to him,  
"Every one is searching for you."
- [38] And he said to them,  
"Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also;  
for that is why I came out."
- [39] And he went throughout all Galilee,  
preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.