

Praying the Day with Jesus

Mark 1:29-39

February 7, 2021

We are nearly eleven months into this pandemic which has impacted our lives in so many ways. We've been isolated from family members and friends, left to spend weeks, months, nearly a year separated from those whom we hold dear. Millions have been infected with the coronavirus, and while many have recovered, too many around the world have died and others continue to suffer long-term effects.

What does a story of Jesus as healer mean to us in the face of such devastation and loss? We wonder why Jesus is not at the bedside of everyone who is infected, healing their fever, and raising them to new life as he did for Simon's mother-in-law. That evening when the townspeople brought to Jesus all who were sick or possessed with demons, why were many healed, but not all?

There are understandable medical reasons why some people have been more vulnerable to the coronavirus than others, and even lost their lives. Inequities in our society have played a significant role in impacting Black and Latino communities more than others. But these explanations do not diminish the pain or sense of loss. Where is God in the midst of all this?

As I prayed with this passage, I found myself guided into prayer, prompted by the varied settings in this passage. And in that prayer, I found God in the midst of it all, and I trust that others might experience the loving presence of God as well. Let me share how this story guided me in prayer.

The story of Simon's mother-in-law takes place in their home. Jesus enters into their family dwelling, probably expecting a Sabbath meal, but finds an urgent need. In these days of confinement to home, we can find Jesus with us, helping us navigate the stresses of our family lives and our isolation. Absent our previous normal routines and activities, many who are living alone have become lonely, sad, and even depressed. With families juggling work, school, and household chores all within the same four walls, it is easy for nerves to be frayed and tension to rise.

What if we invite Jesus into our homes? Imagine for a moment the impact the calm, peaceful, healing presence of Christ could make in your home. How would it feel to have a sense of Christ's presence with you? For those living alone, Jesus offers companionship, a comforting conversation partner who empathizes with our pain, receives our prayers, and responds with heartfelt love. Sometimes

I journal my conversations with Jesus. For households with more than one person, how might the dynamics shift when we invite Jesus to inhabit our home? There was anxiety in Simon's home as family members worried about the health of the mother-in-law. Jesus undoubtedly calmed their anxious nerves as they yielded to his powerful presence. When we are attentive to God's presence with us, the Holy One absorbs some of the stress and tension, freeing us to be more focused on others. The light of Christ reminds us to look for the spark of the divine in one another, even or especially in our brokenness. Soaking in the wisdom of Christ can guide us in resolving conflict with grace and love. Welcoming Jesus into our homes can have a transformative effect.

That evening the villagers brought to Jesus all who were sick or possessed with demons. Mark says that the whole city of Capernaum was at the door of Simon's home. Scholars suggest that the population of the village was about 1,500. Imagine the gathered crowd, some hobbling with canes, children carried by parents, some transported on stretchers. Mark tells us that Jesus cured many who were sick and cast out many demons.

This scene invites us to bring our village into Jesus' presence. Whom do we carry in our hearts and in our thoughts? In prayerful imagination, we can carry our loved ones into the presence of Jesus. We can sense healing energy arising from his very presence surrounding our beloved with whatever meets their need: forgiveness, empowerment, courage, unconditional love. In our imagination, allow those whom we carry to Jesus to bathe in his graceful presence. How might being in the presence of Christ impact their grief, their fear, their anger – whatever troubles them? Instead of feeling powerless, we can continue to bring our loved ones to Jesus in this way day by day, entrusting them to God's loving care. Jesus is available, accessible to receive the longings of our hearts.

Jesus rose early the next morning to find a deserted place to pray. He was intentional about spending time with God. Ultimately, prayer is a time of resting in God's presence, listening to God's still small voice, drawing from the well of Living Water, restoring our soul. I imagine that Jesus recalled those words spoken at his baptism, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." In the solitude of prayer we are reminded of our precious nature in the sight of our divine Parent, one who treasures us as we are and who desires a flourishing life for all. When, like Jesus, we rest in God's presence, we find that God is with us, God is for us.

Jesus' prayer time was interrupted by the disciples. They wondered how to deal with the crowds in Capernaum who were eager to meet Jesus. Jesus chose

not to return to the village. He went out to neighboring towns to proclaim the good news of God's saving grace. His ministry went beyond one village and expanded to encompass the region.

We can pray Jesus' presence into arenas beyond our own circles of concern. We can imagine Jesus walking the hallways of hospitals, refueling the energy of health care workers, sparking hope in the hearts of patients. We see Jesus in the farmlands and vineyards, laboring with those who work hard for minimal wages to supply food to nourish the multitudes. Jesus shares their heavy burden of labor, their concern for their own health and that of many family members living in their homes. We invite Jesus to enter into classroom, some at schools, others outside, many at home around the kitchen table. As we envision students who are weary of learning via technology, we can imagine the Holy Spirit shedding love, light, peace, and energy upon them. Imagine Jesus walking into legislative halls where the well-being of communities, states, and the nation are deliberated. Might Jesus' presence soften hardened hearts and inspire leaders toward compassionate action on behalf of their constituents? We can pray Jesus into the rooms of senior residences where individuals are alone, feeling sad and lonely. A word of affirmation, a gentle touch from Jesus offers a spark of hope.

Our prayers may not yield miraculous cures or startling turn of events. Prayer reminds us that God is, that God is with us, that God suffers with those who suffer, God desires saving grace for all God's beloved. Where is God in the midst of this horrific pandemic? God is one with us in our isolation, in our anxiety, in the tension we experience in relationships, in the struggle to accomplish daily tasks, and in the turmoil experienced in our nation. Using our imagination to invite Jesus into our homes, our villages, and our community at large offers assurance that God is indeed with us, even if in small and subtle ways.

May our hearts and minds welcome Jesus to share the burdens and the simple joys of each and every day.

Come, Jesus, come and be our guest. We long to grow closer to you, to sit at table with you, to share meaningful conversation, to listen for your wisdom, to feel your gentle touch. We are grateful for your life and ministry which remind us that God is indeed with us. As we rest in your presence, may your Holy Spirit grow within us that we might be ambassadors of your love to others.

We pray for your healing presence in our homes, our circles of friendship, our community, nation, and world. Ease the tension built up in relationships. Embrace students, teachers, and parents struggling through this difficult season

of Learning. Renew the bodies, minds and spirits of health care workers who are exhausted.

Abide, O God, with those who are marginalized and who fear for their safety and their future. Wrap in your loving arms those living without shelter. Nourish the spirits of those who are hungry. Guide all seeking employment. Offer hope to persons of color who feel discounted and whose needs have not been considered.

Grant wisdom to national and international leaders as they wrestle with a multitude of issues that threaten the lives entrusted to their care.

Revive the Church of JC, that we might speak the truth of the value of every human life. Grant us laser focus on the call of Christ, in whose name we pray.
Amen.