

**The Rev. T. Stewart Lucas
St. Margaret's Church
February 8, 2009
Mark 1:29-39**

Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever,
and they told Jesus about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then
the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

In the name of one God, Creator, Healer, and Sustainer. AMEN.

I wonder what she was really like, Simon's mother-in-law. I wonder if she even liked Simon. He might not have been her favorite. But she and her husband must have arranged the marriage back in those days, finding someone who could take care of their beloved daughter. I wonder if Simon liked her cooking or if her matza was a little bland. We don't always seem to give our in-laws very much credit. Simon was a fisherman, just like his father and his father's father. Yet now he had left his job and decided to follow some street preacher, claiming to be the Messiah, their Savior. I wonder what his mother-in-law thought of that? I bet she didn't approve. How was he ever going to make enough money to take care of their daughter?

And now this poor woman is lying in bed with the flu I guess and burning up with a fever. Her daughter is applying cold rags to her head when in walks Simon with this street preacher of his named Jesus, the Christ. She was certainly doubtful of his abilities and even surer that she didn't want to receive any visitors bringing home communion. Her hair wasn't fixed, her makeup wasn't applied, and she was dripping with sweat from her fever in that old flax housecoat. When all of the sudden this stranger walks over, takes her hand and lifts her up, healing her from her fever.

She had heard about this supposed healer, but she didn't really believe it could be. What was healing after all? She would just wait this fever out, drink plenty of fluids, and be back on her feet in no time. She could take care of herself just fine, thank you very much. She didn't need any help from any ambling evangelist.

We don't have a very positive feeling about supposed healers either. I have this image of that televangelist Benny Hinn who you always see on the Trinity Broadcasting Network. You know, he has this really bad toupee, a perfectly tailored white suit, an enticing accent, and an amazing stage presence. He starts talking about the man in the auditorium sitting in Row 34, Seat 17. He somehow knows his home address and even that he has a cancerous tumor growing on his brain. He calls him and his wife up the stage, speaks some bizarre prayer in tongues, and then touches his head. "BE HEALED!" and the man falls to the floor trembling, caught by the posse of well-dressed ushers with inconspicuous ear-pieces. For some reason his wife hits the floor too, overcome with the Holy Spirit

Not very plausible, especially when we know that many of these supposed healers are actually frauds, staging these events to get people in the depths of their pain and despair to send him a check so that they too can be healed.

But while we are wary of these supposed healers, we want to believe in those miracles too. We've all had an illness in our family or heard of someone with a terrible disease or emotional situation and prayed for a miracle. Sure, sometimes they happen, but how many people do you know who have been raised from the dead?

We even have a sacramental rite in our Book of Common Prayer that gives us words for laying hands on those who are in need of healing. I'd like to do a bit of education here and get you to open up those red books in the pews or under your chairs and turn to page 455. We don't use those books very often any more, and one day, God forbid, you might need to know where to find some of these prayers. There are some pretty powerful words on those pages. At the top of page 456 we pray, "*I lay my hands upon you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, beseeching our Lord Jesus Christ to sustain you with his presence, to drive away all sickness of body and spirit, and to give you that victory of life and peace which will enable you to serve him both now and evermore. Amen.*"

I've found those to be the hardest words we have to say in this business, and yet I cling to them so often at the bedside of those whom I visit in the hospital. Those words are hard for me to say because I know that I don't have any magic touch. I don't have anything in my body or my presence that will give you sight or clean out your arteries. I don't have any tricks up my sleeve or even a prescription pad to give you the cure.

So why do we do it? We do it because there is something in that physical touch. There is something mysterious about that touch. There is part of Christ that is in each one of us that says, "You can do this." You can get through this with the abundant grace of God. You are not alone, and this community will show you the presence of the Living Christ.

I believe that in that in between space, something does happen. I do believe in healing. But I believe we must be open to the way God wants to heal us. God may not make us better. God may not make the fever go away. God may not ease the pain from that broken relationship quite yet. God may not wipe away the tears from your grief today. God may not even keep us from dying.

A few years ago I was called to the bedside of a man who was close to death at the Joseph Richey Hospice in Baltimore. His family was singing his favorite songs and we said some psalms as he drifted in and out of consciousness. We anointed him with oil and we prayed some of the prayers that we just looked at in the prayer book. And then I found myself praying out loud for his healing. I felt awkward and wanted to take the words back, for we knew in our hearts that he was close to death. But then I realized that even in death, God would heal this child of God. For in death, we find life everlasting and a wonderful feast prepared for us at the heavenly banquet table where there is not sighing or grief. The Resurrection is what heals us, the promise of eternal life beyond any that we can ever understand here on earth.

Healing, true healing, requires us to be open to the path that God sets before us and open to the peace that passes all understanding. Healing requires us to give up control and let God lead the way. It's not an easy road to take by any means because being healed may take more work than being sick. Getting healthy will take more effort than wallowing in self pity. Getting well may mean depending on other people for a while instead of taking care of everything yourself. Moving on with your life will mean letting go of some people and things that you thought were indispensable.

But in that in between space, as soon as you let go, God shows up at the most unexpected moment with loads of grace. That grace may be a hug from a friend, a vase of flowers, a loaf of bread, or a ride to the hospital, but make no mistake about it, if you open up your life to the possibilities of God's healing, it will be there. For we know that he came and took her by the hand and lifter her up. And then the fever left her, and she began to serve them a wonderful feast at her table.