

## LIFTED UP

SHERARD EDINGTON

Mark 1:29-31

For Christians, the word resurrection is a powerful word. It points us to the suffering Jesus endured on the cross, wrongly sentenced to death by execution. It reminds us of his dying and being placed in a borrowed tomb. It reminds us of how on the third day, at dawn following the Sabbath, that some women go to the tomb in order to make the proper arrangements for burial of the body. They discover that the tomb is open and empty. A young man is there dressed in a white robe. He says to the women, *Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised* (16:6).

Resurrection is a powerful word. For Christians, it represents God's power to change the world, God's power over all things—even death, God's power to forgive and offer new life, God's power to restore.

We affirm that belief each week when we say these words from the Apostles Creed about how Jesus *Was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into hell; The third day he rose again from the dead.*

You may not have noticed it, but there was a resurrection event in today's reading from the Gospel of Mark. The Gospel of Mark is the earliest of our four gospels. In my opinion, its purpose was to get this story of Jesus of Nazareth down on paper as quickly as possible. You can sense Mark's impatience as you read. Mark opens his gospel with John the Baptist baptizing in the wilderness. John is the messenger sent to announce the one who is coming who *will baptize... with the Holy Spirit*. Jesus arrives from Galilee and is baptized by John in the Jordan. Jesus then faces the temptations of the devil in the wilderness, he begins his ministry in Galilee, and he calls four disciples. Then, in his first public display of power, he casts out a demon from a possessed man. I preached on that story last week. Jesus was invited to the synagogue in Capernaum in Galilee to interpret the scriptures during the worship service on the Sabbath. While he is there, a man possessed by an unclean spirit shouts out, *What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?* Jesus commands the spirit out of the man and the people observing this are amazed. *What is this?* they ask, *a new teaching—with authority?*

Jesus and his disciples leave the synagogue and walk over to the home of Simon and Andrew. The house is in Capernaum not far from the synagogue. In the house is Simon's mother-in-law. She is sick in bed with a fever. The others inform Jesus about her situation. Jesus goes to the woman and takes her by the hand and *lifted her up*. The fever leaves the woman and *she began to serve them*.

This story of Simon's mother-in-law is a healing story, but it is also a resurrection story. When Jesus healed the woman Mark tells us that he *lifted her up*. This word for *lifted up* in Greek is *egeiro*. Mark uses this same word in several other stories about healings. For example, a boy who is possessed is brought to Jesus. The disciples are powerless to do anything. Jesus takes the boy by the hand and *lifted him up* (9:27). The boy is made well.

More significantly, we find this word used at the end of Mark's gospel when the three women go out to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. They encounter there the angel who says to them, *You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised*. This word raised is the same Greek word *egeiro*. Jesus has been raised, he has been lifted up. Simon's mother-in-law was also lift up—a resurrection.

At the beginning of the Gospel, the message Jesus brings is, *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news*. To a person looking for good news this sounds great, the kingdom of God has come near. But they are only words and others had spoken them before. Why should anyone listen to this man from Nazareth? Because he backs up his words with power. In the synagogue he preaches with authority, the unclean spirits obey him. At Simon's house he heals the woman. Word of this gets around and that day people bring him the sick and possessed and he cures them. He will go on to cure a man of leprosy, and heal a paralyzed man as well. He will cast out demons, heal the deaf, the blind, the dying. All of these are expressions of his power and his love. It is evidence that indeed *the kingdom of God has come near*.

There's a second word in this story which makes *lifted up* even more profound. That word is *serve*. Jesus *lifted her up* and the fever left her *and she began to serve them*.

Now, there are several ways to approach what may be going on here. One way is to say, "So, Jesus heals this woman so that she can make sandwiches for the boys." That will make some of you bristle. Was this woman nothing more than a broken servant that needed repairing so she could perform her job? That interpretation certainly makes me uncomfortable.

So let's go back to the previous important word. Jesus did not simply lift up the woman for healing but as a foreshadowing of his own being lifted up—his own resurrection. When Jesus heals he does not simply cure, he brings new life. Was this woman going to die from her fever? I don't know. Possibly. When Jesus heals the man with leprosy that man is able to return to his community. He doesn't get his old life back, he gets a new life. When Jesus heals the paralyzed man that person is able to walk again. Up to that point, he had depended on his friends to carry him about. He has a new life now. All those healed by Jesus have new lives.

The woman with the fever is healed and immediately she offers herself in service to Jesus. She is not healed so that she may serve; she serves because she has been healed.

Later in this gospel we read Jesus words about his purpose, *For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many* (10:45). Simon's mother-in-law—cured of her illness—gives her life in service. At the end of the Gospel, when Jesus is dying on the cross, the men have all run away, but the women are there. We read: *There were also women looking on from a distance... These used to follow him and [served] him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.* We learn from these women that service is discipleship.

Today we gather at the table. Just as Jesus served his disciples in that upper room, and as the women served Jesus, and as so many through the ages have given their lives in service, may we also serve those in our world today. As we are served these sacraments, may we, in turn, take Christ into the world. May our actions proclaim the good news, may our service show that the kingdom of God has come near. As Christ lifts us up, may we lift up the world. Amen.