

Mark's gospel is characterized by an almost manic energy on the part of Jesus. It begins with a brief prelude on the ministry of John the Baptist, culminating in the baptism of Jesus, and then we're off to the races. Today, still early in Mark's gospel, we get a sense of the explosive nature of Jesus' ministry in first century Palestine. On the same day that Jesus has driven out a demon from a possessed man in the synagogue, we find him in the house of Simon and Andrew, who are very likely wondering if Jesus is the real deal. So they tell Jesus that Simon's mother in law is sick with a fever. He immediately cures her, and just in time too, because it's noon and the guys are getting hungry. Ahem.

Since it is the Sabbath, and Jewish law prohibits work or travel until the Sabbath is over, the town waits for darkness to fall. The Sabbath ends, and pow! everyone in town comes to Simon and Andrew's house, carrying their sick and disturbed kinfolk. You can imagine the chaotic scene as the townspeople struggle to be noticed by Jesus, who calmly cures whoever is placed before him. The text states that he cured "many", which leads us to believe that perhaps some were *not* cured that evening. Hold that thought. Eventually, everyone goes home for some rest. But Jesus needs to be rejuvenated, and early in the morning, he goes out to a deserted place to pray and replenish his spirit. Not for long! The apostles, duly impressed by last night's performance and enjoying the limelight, hunt for him. Isn't it cool, they exclaim, everyone is looking for you! Jesus doesn't go back to town, however, but sets off for neighboring villages. There is no stopping the Jesus train.

Notice that Jesus *cures* some people, *heals* some people, and in other cases he *drives out demons*. Pay careful attention to the distinction. First let's look at the two very similar words, *cure* and *heal*. Indeed, these are usually considered synonyms, but careful reading of their meaning and connotation reveals a subtle difference. Today's gospel has Jesus curing people who were sick. Very similar to a visit to the doctor's office. To cure someone means to *alleviate their symptoms*. To heal someone is to *make them whole*. A cure is a transactional event, while a healing is a transformative process. Let's take an example. If you have a cold or the flu, you seek to be cured. Period. Get some over the counter medications, see the doctor if they don't work, and expect to get better in a couple of weeks, max. It's simple and short-lived.

Healing goes well beyond curing. Healing is about reintegration and wholeness, about a more fundamental change. Most of the time, a good cure is on the pathway to full healing. This is the expected route. But some people do not find a cure for their ailments. The question then is this: is it possible to be healed and never cured? Years ago I told the story of my brother, Steven, who contracted colon cancer at the ripe old age of 38. The cancer killed him 7 years later. But without a doubt, he was completely healed when he died. You see, the cancer forced him to deal with his life in the immediacy of the moment. At the time of his diagnosis, he was living a life on the edge. He was into drugs, alcohol, gambling and shady deals. He would hit up one of us siblings for some extra cash, you know, can I borrow a couple of hundred bucks – I'll pay you back. He had a job selling clothes in a big and tall men's clothing store (he was shorter than me) and drove a car with two hubcaps missing. I remember visiting him in his Long Beach apartment one weekend. We sat in the living room on two folding beach chairs, drank beer, and watched ESPN on television. The only other furniture in the room was a TV tray with a coffee maker on it. But he wasn't depressed – his ship was coming in any day now, just you see.

Cancer hit him like a ton of bricks. Surgeries, chemotherapy, horrible side effects, you name it. With no medical insurance, his entry into the health system was through the emergency room at Harbor Medical Center. They did the best they could. Our entire family prayed for a cure, aunts and uncles, cousins and siblings, friends and neighbors. Why wasn't Jesus curing him, we moaned? Maybe, I realized much later, Jesus was too busy healing him. Over the course of that long slog to death's door, Steven learned what it meant to be a child of God. He learned to pray, he learned to accept, he learned to reach out to other people. Two months before he died, even though he was wasting away, he heard about a guy down the street who had ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease. Steven put on a coat and walked to the guy's house, banged on the door and on its opening, introduced himself. I'm Steven Hodsdon, he said. I'm dying of cancer, but I want to talk to Jim. Healing somehow begets healing, even outside of the sick person.

Notice that Jesus cures some people, heals some people, and for others he "drives out demons," which seems different somehow. It is. Casting out demons brings us closer to the notion of healing. A demon is a foreign invader, an outside force that changes the very nature of the person under its control. When Jesus casts out the demon, the person is returned to their true nature. Think of a drug addict who is freed from the need for that next high,

freed from the lies and depression, freed from the aching reality of their condition. When Jesus heals, a person is restored. In John's gospel, without being asked, Jesus cures a blind man. Next week, having been asked, Jesus cures *and heals* a leper, restoring him to society. Then there's the story in Luke's gospel of Jesus being presented with a paralytic man dropped through the roof. To the shock of the Pharisees, Jesus forgives him his sins. Note the importance of that action. There's something broken about this paralytic man that goes beyond his physical condition. Jesus has just *healed* him, but to make the point that he acts in the person of God, he then cures him and has him walk away.

Every illness, every injury, has within it immediate access to a healing. If you are suffering from any such condition today, whether it's the flu, a broken leg, a debilitating condition, or something life threatening, can you step back and ask the question, how is Jesus attempting to *heal* me right now? Because he is. He may cure you as well, but he may not. A friend of mine tells the story of a phone call he received from his father, who was in hospice care. His father exclaims to his son, "Mike, great news!" Mike thinks, "Wow, some amazing health breakthrough?" His Dad goes on, "Isn't it great, they've given me two weeks to live!" Now that's a man who is totally healed, totally whole, totally ready to be ushered into the presence of Jesus.

All of our lives come to an end. The mortality rate in this building is 100 percent. At some point, we too will hear the words, "There is no cure for your condition." We'll either cry or rejoice at these words, maybe a bit of both. But recognize that the healing power of Jesus is never withdrawn. Every single one of us can be healed, can be made whole. All you have to do is ask. What do you say we start getting *healed* now? Peace.