

“Do You Have a Mother-in-Law Story?”

Mark 1:29-39

Preached by

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I had the finest mother-in-law a person could ever want. She was as good to me as my own mother. This is why mother-in-law jokes never appealed to me. None of them described Jackie’s mother.

However, if she were alive, I think she would give me permission to tell a couple of mother-in-law jokes this morning. She had a good sense of humor and would understand that you cannot have a biblical story about a mother-in-law and not have a little fun with it.

Do you know why Adam and Eve were so happy in the Garden of Eden? Neither one of them had a mother-in-law.

Do you know who stands behind every successful man? A surprised mother-in-law.

I may have to answer to my mother-in-law for telling these jokes when I see her in heaven. She will probably ask me why I didn’t tell any son-in-law jokes. Come to think of it, I’m not sure I know any.

I doubt that Simon told any mother-in-law jokes, especially on this day. His mother-in-law was sick, certainly too sick to go to the synagogue, and he seemed to be very concerned. It was the first thing he told Jesus when they entered his home after attending worship in the synagogue.

Without saying anything, Jesus went to her bedside and healed her. Immediately she got out of bed and began serving those who came for a visit.

No doubt word about what Jesus did for her spread quickly throughout Capernaum because after sundown, sick people from all over Capernaum gathered at Simon’s door. Jesus healed many of them, too.

The next morning, Jesus rose before daybreak and found a deserted place to pray. After the sun came up, Simon and the disciples came looking for him. Evidently, the people gathered again at Simon’s door hoping Jesus would heal them. Upon finding Jesus, they informed him that everyone was searching for him, implying that he needed to return and pick up where he left off the previous night.

Can you imagine their surprise when Jesus refused to go back? “Let us go on to the neighboring towns so that I may proclaim the message there, also. That is what I came to do.” Mark informs us that Jesus went to other towns around Galilee, doing in those villages what he did for his friends in Capernaum.

What can we take away from this story today? Let me suggest some ideas.

Helping sick people was important to Jesus. Simon’s mother-in-law was not the first person Jesus healed that day, nor would she be the last. Earlier in the day, Jesus cast an unclean spirit out of a man who interrupted him while he was teaching in the synagogue and after sundown, the sick from all over town showed up at Simon’s house in order to see Jesus.

Why did Jesus heal them, even on the Sabbath, when it would open him up for criticism? He cared about people. Meeting people’s needs, including their physical needs, was his top priority. It was for this reason God sent him, and he let nothing interfere.

Mark presents Jesus in the opening scenes of his gospel as a healer, the Great Physician, even though he paid a high price to help people. Powerful religious leaders became jealous of him because of the crowds he attracted, and the number of people following him. One reason they eventually crucified him was because he threatened their influence, position and security.

Knowing this did not intimidate him, though. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, he paused to heal the High Priest’s servant after Peter cut his ear off. That’s how passionate he was about healing wounds, all kinds of wounds, so people could live their lives free from suffering and pain.

What do you think Mark would say to us this morning based upon his strong emphasis upon Jesus’ healing ministry? I’ve given this a lot of thought in recent months in light of the health care debate going on in our country.

I believe Mark would tell us not to overlook the importance Jesus placed upon helping those who were sick. While there is a spiritual dimension to healing, there is also a physical one. We need to pray for people who are sick, but we also need to partner with God, like Jesus did, to bring about healing. There is a role God plays, and there are things we must do, too.

I do not know the best way to provide health care to our citizens. This is a decision others with much more knowledge must make.

What I do know is that Jesus made healing sick people a priority, and so must we. As a matter of fact, he reached out to people with a sense of urgency, which was one of the themes of Mark's gospel. His use of the word, "immediately" in this story makes it the ninth time he has done so, and this is just the first chapter.

For Jesus, there was no time to waste because there was much to do and so little time to do it. People were hurting, needed attention, and nothing, not even religious rules nor ceremonial rituals, was going to slow him down.

We must have the same passion and resolve. While we can debate the best strategy for addressing the medical needs of our citizens, we must do so with compassion, empathy, a sense of urgency and a commitment to restore people to wholeness. We can do no less as disciples of the Great Physician.

There is something else I see in this passage. **While helping sick people was important to Jesus, seeking God's help was important to him.**

Mark said Jesus rose early in the morning, while it was still dark, and went to a deserted place to pray. This was, no doubt, after a busy night of healing people who came to Simon's house for help.

Why did he do this? He was facing one of the most critical decisions of his life and needed guidance. He knew the good people of Capernaum, including his disciples, wanted him to stay there and be their hometown rabbi, which had to be appealing.

Capernaum was a safe and affirming place. He could have lived a long life there and would have been loved and accepted. No one there would have ever cried, "Crucify Him!" but only "Hosanna!" How tempting this must have been, but was it what he came to do? Was this God's will for his life and ministry?

I believe he received the answer that morning when he prayed and felt divine leadership to go elsewhere. Others needed to hear his message and feel his healing touch, too, even though this meant taking great risks. Under God's guidance, he had to leave this comfortable and safe place, as difficult as this was for him and them.

"Let us go on to the neighboring towns so that I may proclaim the message there, also. That is what I came to do," Jesus said to his disciples.

Decisions between good and good are always the toughest for me to make. It is agonizing when I am caught between two good decisions. I want to do both and struggle to let one go. Like Jesus, I have to spend a lot of time seeking God's input, asking for divine guidance.

Maybe that's where you are in your life now. You are caught between two good choices and need to make a decision. How do you decide?

Talk to others, including God. Ask who needs you more or which direction would exercise your faith and help you grow. Listen to your heart, which will help you identify your passion and purpose.

One thing I have discovered is that God gets uncomfortable when we get comfortable.

When we decide that we want to stay in nice, friendly, safe Capernaum, this disturbs God. This is not to say that Capernaum is a bad place. To the contrary, it is a wonderful place, and we need Capernaum. Jesus did. He made Capernaum his base of operation. He returned often to rest and find encouragement from dear friends.

However, it was not the only place his voice needed to be heard and his touch needed to be felt. The world awaited him and God reminded him that morning.

Have you grown too comfortable? Are you more concerned about building a safe nest than responding to the needs of hurting people? I suspect we all have.

Where is your Capernaum? Who needs you to venture outside your cocoon and notice them? Whose pleas for help are you not hearing because you are voicing your own desires so loudly? Whose needs are going unmet because you are unwilling to take risks?

Three years ago this month, the founder of *Habitat for Humanity*, Millard Fuller, died suddenly of a heart attack. He was seventy-three years old.

He is the one that coined the phrase, “the theology of enough.” “We have enough resources,” Fuller said on many occasions, “to take care of the world’s need, but not its greed.”

At age 29, Fuller was a millionaire living the American Dream. He was also losing his family because of misplaced priorities and neglect. After several candid talks with his wife, Linda, Fuller sold what he owned, gave the proceeds to charity and moved to Koinonia Farms, a Christian commune in Americus, Georgia. It was there that he conceived the idea of building homes with no-interest mortgages for the poor. From 1973-1976, Fuller and his family lived in Zaire to develop that program.

In 1976, Fuller returned to Americus and began *Habitat for Humanity*. Since then, almost 1.5 million no-interest homes have been built all over our country with the aid of volunteers and future occupants of those homes. Even after separating from Habitat in 2005, Fuller continued to build houses for the poor through the *Fuller Center for Housing*. He pursued this passion until the day he died.

When Fuller arrived in heaven, what do you think the Lord said to him? Do you think it is possible that He whispered in his ear as He gave him a big hug, “Thank you, Millard, for not getting too comfortable?” I do.

Will He say the same thing to you and me? Think about it this week when you go to your quiet place.