

*Do
This*



*in
Remembrance
of me*

February 7, 2021



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
129 Miller Avenue - Portsmouth, NH 03801
Office Phone 603-436-6038
Email - office@fumcportsmouth.net
Website - fumcportsmouth.com

Pastor - Rev. Dr. Debra J. Hanson

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Prelude Invitation

Call to Worship:

Jesus enters our lives and our time of worship, giving his care, compassion, and love to us. May we find healing today and every day as we worship together in the presence of Christ our Savior!

Hymn: “He Touched Me” (UMH #367)

Reading the Word: Mark 1:29-39

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him 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.

That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” He answered, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.” And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Ministry of Music

Message: “Ministry of Healing”

In the movie, “Leap of Faith,” Steve Martin played Jonas, a phony faith healer who cons the people attending his shows into believing that he has the God-given gift of healing others. When one of the trucks breaks down in a small town, Jonas decides to accept the challenge of making more money off the residents there. His helpers did their usual search to find people who were willing to make a few dollars by posing as a crippled or sick person so Jonas could perform his healing miracles on them.

Jonas wears a signature jacket that is silver sequined and sparkles as he performs his theatrical so-called miracles of healing. About the time the local sheriff is ready to charge him with fraud, a young man whose crippled status has been diagnosed as being psychosomatic appears without being chosen by the Jonas’ staff, and even though Jonas

doesn't really want to do his act with this very innocent young man, he ends up doing it anyway, but half-heartedly. To everyone's amazement, including Jonas', the young man stands and walks. (Adapted from Rob Hartill, found at http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0104695/plotsummary?ref_=tt_stry_pl).

There have been many miracle healers over the course of time, and unfortunately, many of them are like Jonas, and they have a bad influence on the healing ministry in churches - to the point where a number of churches don't address healing ministry because people are looking for a fantastic show of miraculous restoration. In today's scripture, we find Jesus in Capernaum, leaving the synagogue where he had just healed a man from demon possession, something that was not for show, but for compassion for the man. He and the disciples then go to Simon Peter's home where they discover that Simon's mother-in-law is very ill with a fever.

It is helpful to remember that, in those days they couldn't just take an aspirin, get a good night's sleep and wait for the fever to break. In Jesus' day, a fever that put someone in bed to the point of being incapacitated often developed into a much more serious illness and often death. They didn't have the same medical advantages that we have today. In addition, every member of the household was vitally important, and when someone couldn't do the work that was theirs, another person had to take it over, adding more of a burden on the household.

Most households in Jesus' day were intergenerational with large numbers of family groups living together, and everyone had an assigned task or list of duties. If a woman's husband died and there were no male heirs left, she was out on her own or had to rely on another male head of household to take her in. We don't know the situation with Simon's mother-in-law, and we don't hear anything about his wife. Obviously, he had a wife, and even more obviously, the mother-in-law had an important role in the household - that of hospitality.

Hospitality was a big thing then, even as it is now, so to not be able to offer a meal was an affront. Did Jesus heal this sick woman so they could get a meal? No. Jesus healed her out of compassion and the recognition of her vital role in the household. Just look at HOW he healed her: "He went in to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her, and she served them." (v. 31) Normally, a man would never enter a woman's bedroom unless she was his wife, and touching a woman in public was forbidden. Jesus touched, cared, healed, and broke the rules, teaching and setting the example for how God wants us to interact with each other. Even this early in the gospel of Mark, we have a clear understanding that Jesus is a different kind of Messiah - one who brings the presence of God to the people and for ALL people.

God wants us to have life in abundance, and Jesus brought healing and wholeness to those whom he touched and healed. He also brought faith. One of the commentators I read this week in preparing for the sermon suggested that Peter's mother-in-law could have even been among those many nameless women who traveled with Jesus to care for their needs.

This mother-in-law didn't rise from her sick bed and immediately go to make a meal because it was demanded of her or even expected of her. Rather she was not only freed from her fever and illness, but she was set free to serve. Maybe she realized that serving was a calling and a gift she could offer others.

As Professor David Lose writes: "Jesus frees us not only from things that seek to oppress us, but also for a life of purpose, meaning, and . . . those things that we do as a response to the Gospel to serve [God and others]." (Text This Week under the commentaries for this week's lesson) When we see ourselves as being set free to serve God, we see our lives as having purpose, serving, and offering our time, talent, and treasure generously. Our focus becomes outward rather than self-centered. It isn't that we neglect our own health and development, but we find a balance of growing in faith and reaching out to intersect with other people's lives.

Jesus continued his ministry after leaving Simon's house. He could have capitalized on his quickly growing fame just as Jonas in "Leap of Faith" did. Jesus could have stayed put and reveled in his newfound popularity and status, but he didn't. First, he took time to go off to a quiet place, to regroup, to reconnect, to refocus, and then he and the disciples moved on where he preached and healed wherever he went. This is a model for us as the Church. We are called to take time to regroup, reconnect, refocus, pray, worship, and grow together, and then move out into wherever we live and work and pay to BE the Church in the world.

The Church is called to offer healing, restoration, reunion, reorientation, growth, and purpose. We proclaim Jesus' message of acceptance and healing, and we live it in the world. It is in our living that we offer Christ to the world. It is in our living that we model what life in Christ is like. It is in our living that we bring healing through a simple act of caring, being present when someone needs us, reaching out to help those who are struggling whether it's a family member, friend, co-worker, neighbor, or even a stranger. We are empowered to live into all that God intends for us to be and to become. It's a life-long process of growing in faith and service - personal holiness and social holiness. Healing takes place in our lives and in the lives of others through our service to the world.

The ministry of healing in the church comes directly from Jesus' example and empowerment. As the Church, we are called to carry on that ministry in Jesus' name, and not in the way that Jonas the so-called faith healer did, but in the example of Jesus. So, what is healing, anyway? Is it the miraculous ability to walk after being confined to a wheelchair for years - of course, but what if - even in spite of our prayers - the person can't get up? What happens when we pray for healing and seemingly nothing happens?

In so many stories about Jesus healing people, we hear him say, “Your faith has made you well.” Does that mean our faith isn’t strong enough if we aren’t healed?

It’s important to think about the difference between wishing for something and praying about something. Sometimes healing is spiritual; sometimes healing comes through death; sometimes healing comes gradually and barely noticeable, sometimes it takes years, sometimes we are healed in different ways. When my mom was moved to a nursing facility in the late stages of Alzheimer’s Disease, she went downhill pretty quickly, but we all knew that she hadn’t been herself for nearly ten years. She wasn’t the mother we knew. I found myself praying that she would be set free from her disease, and I knew that the only way that would happen was for her death. I didn’t want her to suffer any more – I wanted her to be freed from a body that had betrayed her and a mind that had become muddled and confused and no longer logical. Her healing came when she died and was set free from her illness that had debilitated her, and through it all she was nurtured through her family and church.

We, the Church of Jesus Christ, are called to healing ministry: through our prayers and service, through our interactions with others in relationships, through our service to the world. Every touch, every kind word, every blessing we share becomes a way to bring healing to a world that is hurting and fractured. We begin with where we are and with who we are. God will work through us, and we can trust that. It’s a journey. And we are blessed to be a blessing as we take this path of life, enter into ways of offering healing, and grow into the fullness of God’s love together.

Prayer:

Sometimes, O God, we miss the ways in which we are healed. We look so hard for the magnificent miracle, that we fail to see how you touch our lives with your love and compassion. Sometimes, your healing comes through others: medical personnel, a hug from a loved one or friend, a caring phone call, a card that arrives to brighten our day, through prayer and reading scripture, and through knowing that others pray with us and for us. Forgive us for not paying attention. Forgive us for not reaching out to bring your healing love to others. May we know your forgiveness that continues to bring wholeness to our lives. Thank you, gracious and giving God. Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

A Service of Holy Communion

Hymn: “There is a Balm in Gilead” vv. 1,3 (UMH #375)

Blessing



PRAYER LIST

Jen Patria, Naomi, Bill Stover, Townley Family, Erin Frane, Carol,
Jim Slater, Jeanne Westcott, Gayle Gardei & Family, Dixon Family,
Dennis Hoskins, Charles Gilman, Barbara Clement, Harry Junkins, Fabio,
Fred, Sophia, Barbara Glidden, Mark & Sarah, Jen, Danny Westbrook,
Millie, Suzanne & Babe, Juliann, Dan Strange, Bobbie Noble,
Durgin Pines Residents & Workers,
Riverside Rest Home Residents & Workers,
Kittery Estates Residents and Workers
Those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19
Those in nursing and assisted living care,
Our Denomination – Our Church Family



FUMC PORTSMOUTH A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

We, the congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, are dedicated in worshipping, learning, and serving with all people as we embrace Jesus Christ's message of love and acceptance. As a United Methodist Church we stand fully behind the statement "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors". We celebrate our diversity and invite all persons regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, marital or socioeconomic status, nationality, physical or mental ability into full membership and participation in the life of this community of faith.



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