

Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 40:21-31

Mark 1:29-39

Healed and Free

Well, I am not sure what you did last Sunday afternoon but I am sure some of you took in a very exciting match up. All the players had prepared well, sparing no expense in terms of time and effort. The stakes were high; the competition was fierce; and the whole world watched.... Now here in Canada mostly we watched the Super Bowl but I confess I am usually more interested in seeing what sort of controversy will come out of the half time show, and many of my U.S. friends are there for the commercials. Here in Canada you may have seen a lovely commercial about connection and community as Tim Hortons together knit Fort Frances, Ontario. And I am sure there is a sermon about community and connection in that. But I'll have to save that for another time. Many of us have begun to see the adds the folks across the border get to see. They are easy to find. "I have to admit, though, that as much as I found the Budweiser puppy endearing and the Katie Couric/Bryant Gumble BMW commercial clever, nothing really equaled the uplifting quality of last year's Duracell commercial featuring Derrick Coleman of the Seattle Seahawks. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzQFA2hxyRQ>

At a young age, Derrick lost his hearing. The commercial told us the story of Derrick being bullied, picked last for teams, harassed by coaches, even not being drafted by the NFL. And then comes the signature line, when Coleman says, "Everybody told me to quit. They told me it was over. But I'd been deaf since I was three, so I didn't listen." ... "And now I'm here, with a lot of fans cheering me on, and I can hear them all." The commercial is so wonderful because it creates a sense of possibility, potential, empowerment, and freedom. Derrick's story of living into the person he felt he was meant to be, against great odds to boot, inspires us because we hope that's our story, too."¹ He decided against all odds to be the person he was created to be. The hearing aids healed him in such a way that the possibility was even greater.

Now usually you hear me complaining about the commercialism of our time and that frustration and concern has not changed, but this commercial connected for me this week as I considered our scriptures.

"This ... commercial represents an emerging approach to advertising that seeks to empower its audience. It's something of a counter-cultural approach in that most of advertising for nearly the last century has been dominated by what Jonah Sachs calls "inadequacy marketing." Such marketing seeks to create in you a sense of lack – the belief that you do not have enough, even

¹ <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/02/epiphany-5-b-freedom-for/>

that you are not enough – in order to promise you that if you purchase the product being advertised you will not experience that sense of lack any longer.”²

“This is still advertising, and the hope of the advertiser is that you will associate these positive emotions and experiences with their product. Hence, in this commercial, Duracell hopes that you will connect the tenacity and spirit of the Seattle Seahawks’ Derrick Coleman with Duracell batteries and be more likely to buy them.”³

“As much as I love that commercial, I’d like to think we might get that feeling in places other than Duracell commercials. At home from supportive parents or spouse. At work from good colleagues. On the athletic field from coaches and teammates. At school from caring teachers and friends. And at church.

...Consider today’s reading for instance. Last week we watched as Jesus’ first action in Mark’s Gospel is to cast out an unclean spirit and interpreted that as God’s commitment to stand against all the powers that keep us from abundant life. This week that pattern continues. Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law, restoring her to her community and vocation.”

Did you notice what Simon’s mother-in-law (I wish she had a name) did as soon as she was healed? She got up and served them. Now I admit when I first read this I thought. This woman has just been healed, brought back from the edges of death, shouldn’t you all be throwing her a party, serving her? Shouldn’t you give her the opportunity to rest a little. But then I began to think about it some more, and I read some more and I came to realize that the gift of healing by Jesus, and by God is that we are made whole, we are made abundant.

“What if the healing of Simon’s mother-in-law was bringing her back to be the mother she always was and that she always wanted to be? And in being brought back to *who* she was, she became a disciple, called to minister, to serve, like the angels did for Jesus in the wilderness and like the Son of Man, who did not come to be served but to serve?... Jesus lifted her up. What if resurrection is being raised up to be who you always were and were always meant to be? ... the radical, emotional, incredible feeling of being you. That being raised up is not just some sort of spiritual future but your present reality, here and now, to live *you*. Your mind, spirit, body, everything together, everything that you were always meant to be. The story of Simon’s mother-in-law tells us that God does not call us to be something we are not but is in the business of restoring us to who we really are.”⁴

Our scripture continues as Jesus heals countless others, restoring them to new life, freeing them from illness and possession to be the person God created them to be. Jesus heals a whole town

²IBID

³ IBID

⁴ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3520>

and then after an interrupted rest he moves on to heal another. Jesus lives out his call to heal and set people free, so that they might recognize who they are free to be.

I always imagine these healing are also stories about waking up. Karoline Lewis writes “most of the time it’s easier to live on the brink, to surround yourself with people and projects and performances that allow you to pretend this is you, that let you avoid the feelings and frustrations and fears that come with acknowledging what is important in your life. It is *so* hard to live who you are. To paraphrase one of my favourite quotes, “The world is full of people who will go through their whole lives and not actually live one day. I do not intend on being one of them.” I think a lot of us spend a good part of our lives living on the periphery of ourselves... The healing of Simon’s mother-in-law is *God..., living who God is*. God called Jesus to be who he was. That’s what the incarnation is all about. Jesus didn’t go around pretending to be something that he wasn’t. ...being who we are is what God wants us to be. God brings us back from the brinks of our lives, from despair, from disease, from desperation, to live. Because then, maybe, we will actually know, feel, and get that *we* are a part, that God needs us to be a part, of what’s at stake for God when God decided to become one of us.

Isaiah tells us that when we follow who God has called us to be our strength will be renewed - we will soar like eagles, run and not get weary. Now before I go on I want to acknowledge that it does not mean we will not have hard times, and it does not mean that when we do it is always because we are not being faithful. Some of us will struggle with illness, depression, disease and more. Reading a single scripture or hearing a story of healing will not take the struggle away. That is why there are also Psalms and stories like that of Job in our scriptures. Being human can be difficult and that is a simple truth.

And yet I do still believe that God calls us to freedom. Throughout all of scripture we learn that God wants to set us all free so that we might live into our God-given identity and potential, joining God in the mission to love and bless the world.

So often we hear that God desires to free us of those things that oppress us, but Jesus also frees us for a “life of purpose, meaning, and good works. (Yes, good works, not those things that we do in the vain hope of justifying ourselves before God or others, but rather those things that we do as a response to the Gospel to serve our neighbour stemming from a sense of joy, love, and freedom.)”⁵

Healing is about restoration to community and restoration of a calling, as well as restoration to life. Healing is about coming into who you are individually and communally. For life without community and calling is indeed difficult. Which makes me wonder what all those who are healed in this chapter did after their healing. What did people throughout all of scripture do when they were healed from various ailments of body, mind and soul? Some I imagine were grateful and immediately returned to life just as it was prior to their debilitation. Others however I’m sure

⁵ Lose, David

realized immediately that they were freed for more, healed for purpose, meaning, service, generosity and calling.

What are the things that you believe you are called to that you are not doing? What do you think God is calling you to? Is it to stand up for yourself or others? Is it to speak to injustices in our world and society? Who or what needs you this week? Imagine that each time you are responding to the needs of people and the world around you you are responding to God's call and living into the freedom that is yours.

Frederick Buechner says "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Where is that place for you? What are the things that warm a place in your heart that you long to speak to? What lights a fire in your belly? God is Calling you in these places.

Be freed by the healing presence of your God as you care for your world, and find your deepest gladness being who you were created to be.

Amen.