

-I want to, just for a second, take you back to a scary time. I want you to think about the first time you had to get in front of people and say something. (It's OK John Thompson, you don't have to live in this memory for very long!) Maybe it was giving a class presentation or a report on something. Maybe it was describing a project you did of some kind. Maybe it was, like me, a prayer or a little sermon. The first time I remember getting up and speaking to a big group of people was when I was asked by my youth pastor in late middle school to help with the sermon. I can't exactly remember what I said, but it was some sort of faith story. I laugh now being through preaching classes in seminary because I remember I did two things really wrong when it comes to preaching. I did what my preaching professor at Pacific Lutheran refers to as the "nervous preacher rock" and I was so nervous on saying something wrong that I put my hand to my mouth in like this silly "thinking" position the whole time and covered my mouth. It so obstructed what I was trying to say that my youth pastor had to kindly enter in and ask me to lower my hand!

-Speaking in front of people for most of us is terrifying because we want to say the right things.

-I think this nervousness of "saying the right thing" has entered into our church life as well. I have had multiple people come into my office through the years and ask a common question in relation to a death, an illness or a personal challenge: "what do I say?"

-You know it's interesting in the Gospel of Mark, which is the shortest of all four Gospels in the bible, Jesus doesn't say a lot. He doesn't orate this ridiculously long sermon on "I am the bread of life" which takes up three chapters in the Gospel of John or preach the endless list of Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount like in the Gospel of Matthew. As we have been talking about in our bible study, Jesus is on the move constantly in the Gospel of Mark and he is on the move, surprisingly, with little or few words.

-Take, for example, this healing story that we have of Simon's mother-in-law this morning. Have you notice that Jesus doesn't say anything?! Instead, he just goes to her. "He (Jesus) came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them."

-Instead of some standing over her and saying some profound, magical, godly words, Jesus just goes and sits with her and takes her hand. Some of the most moving hospital visits I ever did as a hospital chaplain was in witnessing intimate touch between the patient and a partner, spouse, friend, or family member. I remember seeing a man who was having a blood transfusion because of cancer and his 10 year old daughter holding his hand through the entire thing. "I'm so grateful for you," I remember him saying. "At the very least, you help my blood pressure go down so this thing goes faster!", he joked with her. Many times the power of appropriate, intimate touch and presence can be much more life-changing than a bunch of words.

-What's so interesting in Mark, (sorry, bible geek coming on) as I've told our bible study many times is that Mark is great at passing on hints that foreshadow something to

come. Think of it as “bread crumbs” that Mark leaves for the reader along the pathway. “He lifted her up”, I believe, is a bread crumb that Mark has left. *Egiero*, which can be translated as to lift up, to raise, to resurrect. At the end of Mark when Mary and the disciples peer into the tomb and run into a man in white cloth who says: “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been *egieroed* (resurrected).” It’s the same word. “He came to her, took her by the hand, and resurrected her.” Cynthia Bridge Kittridge, president of the Seminary of the Southwest in Austin Texas, writes in a commentary: “The healing of Peter’s mother in law is the first resurrection story in the gospel of Mark”. Perhaps all it takes is sitting and taking one by the hand for one to be resurrected.

-But I think this story goes beyond just healing and being raised. I want to address a little bit of the elephant in the room with what happens after this woman’s resurrection and that “the fever left her and she began to serve them.” Oh thank God, I’m glad after a life threatening fever she was able to serve Jesus a sandwich. Keep in mind, Mark was written in a very patriarchal, male oriented society and I don’t want to explain away challenging verses such as this one too much. With that said, *diakoneo* (“to serve”) could also be a little bread crumb from this gospel’s author. In Mark 15:40-41, as Jesus’ body is hanging on the cross, it reads: “There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. They followed him and *diakoneoed* (“served”) him when he was in Galilee.” I think Mark is getting at something that goes way beyond serving Jesus food. Serving in this context is being a disciple. Serving here is proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

-In this reading, one could argue that since this is the first time this word is used by Mark, this woman isn’t just the first resurrection story but also becomes the first disciple. She got it. Through Jesus’ plain old “just sitting with her and taking her hand”, she was inspired to serve.

-Now I know, those of us who have the Lutheran Scandinavian heritage, like to make fun of ourselves as shy and quiet. We simply don’t have a tradition that is very loud or preachy. Lutherans don’t have a line of famous, televangelist preachers, or history of large Great Awakening crowd moments. You know what? Maybe that’s OK! Maybe discipleship isn’t based on the words you say, but the life and presence you lead. You know what’s also interesting about Jesus’ ministry in Mark is that almost all of it (feeding of the 5000 aside) is done one person at a time. Maybe the good news of Jesus Christ is more about being present with someone face-to-face and less about mass conversion. Maybe one can model more resurrection in the holding of another’s hand than an entire sermon series. Words matter, yes. But resurrection, thank God, is not solely based on words. May our church live more deeply into “resurrecting others” through our appropriate touch, our presence, and our discipleship. Amen.