

I want you to try to think back to this first weekend of February, Super Bowl Sunday, of last year. Try to remember what your routine would have been, maybe what you did to celebrate the big game in the year 2020 BC—that is, Before Covid, or at least before covid changed our daily lives so drastically here in this community. I was where I have been every first weekend of February for years—Snow Camp at Sequanota. Teaching, preaching, singing, playing in the snow, frying donuts...that is what I always do this weekend. As a reminder, a photo popped up on my Facebook feed from Snow Camp a few years ago, and a number of the volunteers and camp staff commented on how much they are missing being able to participate this year. All of us have something that we're missing out on because of this risk we are currently trying to manage; we are not fully who we would normally be right now. And so, we gather in whatever ways are available to us to ask God mercifully to restore us to whole and healthy lives, as individuals, and as a nation, and as a global community.

Keeping this in mind helps today's gospel make better sense to me. Jesus has been teaching in the synagogue and driving out demons, and when he's done, he and his disciples head over to Simon's family's house, presumably for some Sabbath brunch. But Simon's mother-in-law is in bed sick with a fever. So, Jesus lifts her up, curing her fever, and she begins to serve them. It always sounded to me like Jesus, unable to go into the kitchen and make a sandwich for himself, healed Simon's mother-in-law because he was hungry and he needed her to make him a snack. But that kind of self-serving attitude would be quite uncharacteristic for Jesus who, especially in Mark's gospel, is always helping people but trying to escape notice while he's doing it, making his ministry very much about what other people need and not much about himself at all.

Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law not because of what he wanted but because of what she needed—relief from the fever that was keeping her from being wholly herself. Perhaps you know somebody who, like Simon's mother-in-law, has that gift of hospitality; in fact, I know some of you have that gift because I've been on the receiving end of your gracious care. This has been a particularly hard year for anyone who really thrives on welcoming others into their home and caring for them the way Simon's

mother-in-law cared for Jesus and the disciples. If you or someone in your family who usually fills that care taking role has ever been temporarily out of commission because of illness or injury—or had to miss out on providing that welcome because of our current circumstances, maybe during the holidays this year—you know that it's hard to sit still and let someone else fuss about in your kitchen, or not to be able to open up your home at all. You don't feel like yourself when you are unable to do what you've been gifted to do. Jesus restored Simon's mother-in-law not only so she could do what she normally did but so she could be who she really was.

It is easy in our world to confuse what we do with who we are, as if our worth only comes from what we are able to accomplish. God, on the other hand, does not gauge our worth and loveliness by what we do. For those of us who were baptized as infants, we were named and claimed as children of God when we couldn't do much of anything—a powerful reminder that grace is a free gift to us not through our faith but through the faithfulness of God. Yet, who we are as people and what gifts we have to share very much informs how we live and what we do—how we use our gifts for the sake of others, for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of the world.

When she was cured from her fever, Simon's mother-in-law immediately began doing what she was created to do—serve, which is really what all of us are called to do. We aren't all given that same gift for hospitality, but we are all created, called, and equipped to serve the Lord somehow. We are most fully the people we were made to be when we are serving—serving God and others—by using the gifts we were given for that purpose. When something stands in the way of us doing that, we pray that God will take us by the hand and lift us up, so that we can be who we are and do what we do again. We don't become Paul's new creation in Christ by reinventing ourselves, by exercising our own willpower to become something we're not; we become that new creation when God heals our wounds and frees our bonds. Like the relief, and health, and strength we feel after a fever breaks, we are renewed and returned to ourselves through the healing that only comes from God's own restoration. And there is much in our lives and in our world that needs to be restored. May God make us whole and well and give us strength to serve, as we were made and meant to do.