

COVENANT WORD

A Little Resurrection

Isaiah 40:21-31; I Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39

A message by
Rev. Sarah Jackson Shelton
Pastor
Sunday | February 4, 2018

Dear Friends,
Thank you for wanting to read and study these thoughts more carefully. Please know that I do not take full credit for anything that may be contained within, because I may have read or heard something at some point during my pilgrimage and do not remember its source and thus, cannot give the rightful author his/her credit. I pray that you will find inspiration and encouragement.
Sarah Shelton



WHERE FAITH COMES TO LIFE

Jesus came.
Jesus came.

Jesus took her by the hand.
Jesus took her by the hand.

Jesus lifted her up.
Jesus lifted her up.

She served them.
She served them.

Jesus' ministry is just beginning. We could say he is still wet behind the ears from his baptism! The significance of that day, however, has direct parallels to what we witness occurring on his first day on the job. You see, when the heavens are torn apart at his baptism, they are ripped open for a reason; and it isn't just to let the Holy Spirit invade Jesus' life. It is to let the Holy Spirit loose into every aspect of every life so that the barriers we so easily construct can be ripped apart as well. Nothing will ever be the same, because the heavens cannot be closed tightly again. It is in those torn places that God's love gets through.

Barbara Lundblad, professor at Union Seminary, says: "Torn Apart Forever," Jan. 12, 2003, day1.org

The Greek word is a form of the verb *schizo* as in "schism" or "schizophrenia." It is not the same word for "open," as in I open the door. I close the door. The door looks the same regardless of whether it is open or closed. Rather *schizo* refers to something so torn apart that it can never be closed again. The ragged edges never go back together as they [once] were.

So Mark isn't careless in using this word *schizo* to describe the heavens opening at Jesus' baptism. He wants us to know that nothing will be the same again. The heavens will not close tightly, because God came through in Jesus Christ whose entire ministry involves tearing apart the suppositions of who the Messiah was to be.

This is unsettling to think that God has been set loose on earth to undo the things I have so very carefully and intentionally constructed. I rather like living inside prescribed boundaries that keep me feeling safe and comfortable. If I can live within this bubble, then I don't have to worry about who is hungry or hurting, who is cold or sick. I don't have

Jesus' work is boundary-breaking, justice seeking and full of healing.

to worry about whose theology needs correction, or who is "in" and who is "out." Mark's gospel, however, by using the verb *schizo*, makes it clear that Jesus' work is boundary-breaking, justice seeking and full of healing. In Jesus, anything that keeps us from God and anything that keeps us from each other has been ripped away, torn apart, never able to be put back together again in the same way, forever different and forever open.

Jesus, then, not called to to live within prescribed boundaries, should not surprise us when he calls a Greek to be a disciple; or that Jesus is unflappable when a demon not only appears in church but announces its presence by exposing who Jesus is. (Does it bother anyone else that the demons know Jesus by name?) Jesus silences the unclean spirit and then rids the man of it. Mark's gospel moves

with immediate speed from the Spirit possessing Jesus to the demon-invaded man, to the male disciples invading the personal living space of Peter's mother-in-law.

Her story is all of two verses long. It would be easy to pass it over as mere transition, just one of many events in a day in the life of Jesus. I think, however, that it is deserving of a closer look. Mark's tight language tells us a lot.

+ The character in need is a female. It should not surprise us that she has no name. Women were of little significance in Jesus' day. The only important part of her identity, according to culture, is given: she is the mother-in-law of Simon, the lead disciple.

+ She is the first female mentioned in Mark's gospel and it is of significance that Jesus does not overlook her need.

+ To heal her, Jesus does an unusual thing. He takes the initiative. This is something we do not see him do anywhere else. Normally someone points out the need of an individual or the individual themselves approach Jesus for help. This story explicitly states that Jesus "saw" or "found" her and responded to what he saw by touching her.

+ The verb used for Jesus lifting her up (*egeiro*, Mark 16:6) is the same verb used for resurrection later in the gospel. (Ofelia Ortega, *Feasting on the Word*, Yr. B, VI 1, P. 334)

We know that the Bible has many resurrection stories in addition to Jesus' resurrection: Lazarus is raised from the dead as is the son of the widow of Nain and Jairus' daughter. For this verb to be used here, it should awaken our understanding to realize that Jesus is all about resurrection, both big and small from the

Jesus sees her, Jesus reaches out to touch her to call her forth and she responds by arising and serving.

beginning of his ministry to the bitter end. So when he lifts up this woman, it is one of those little resurrections that we might recognize in healed relationships, in re-discovered faith, in restored health. It is to what the prophet Isaiah refers when he says that God gives power to the faint or

increases our strength when we have no might, when we run and don't get weary, when we walk and do not faint. God gives little resurrections to re-identify life as fresh and new.

+ I confess that I have often been scornful that this woman is healed only to immediately serve the men. Her little resurrection doesn't appear fresh and new if all she is healed for is to extend hospitality to her guests.

Isn't this the role of women, after all, barefoot and in the kitchen? The feminist theologians have a field day here, but I think it wiser to watch her do what she knows best but with new intention and understanding. You see, the calling formula that Jesus uses for the men is contained here in this two verse story. (Dennis Smith and Michael Williams, "Peter's Mother-in-Law," *The Storyteller's Companion to the Bible*) The only one of its kind, Mark present an unnamed woman being called to discipleship using the same calling formula as the men: Jesus sees her, Jesus reaches out to touch her to call her forth and she responds by arising and serving. Jesus doesn't demand it. He offers and she responds as a called disciple creating "church" in her home foreshadowing that which is to come.

+ She stands in stark contrast to the disciples who have invaded her home. She serves them. Simon, who often represents the whole of the disciples, does nothing. They won't understand service until after the resurrection of Jesus. She gets it immediately, however, that her love towards Jesus is manifested in the same way as the One who came to serve serves. She is, therefore, the first active witness to what a resurrected life in Jesus looks like. (Karoline Lewis. "On Being Restored to Yourself," *Working Preacher* post 3520) Karoline Lewis writes:

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? ...Have you ever felt like God has brought you back from the brink...to be yourself? That you were called back from a place that was not fully you, to be you? ...What if resurrection is being raised up to be who you always were and were always meant to be? [Maybe resurrection] is the 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 [authentically into yourself]. 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 [that God] is in the business of restoring us to who we really are.

So here's this woman, low in social standing, sick and unclean, and yet Jesus takes the initiative to go to her to allow for a little resurrection as he heals her by lifting her up. She so understands the profundity of the moment that she begins immediately to serve.

As this little resurrection is occurring inside, the whole city gathers outside the door for the same thing. Mark pauses just long enough for us to see that Jesus just cannot seem to find any acceptable friends, for the crowd is full of those who are sick in body and in mind; those who have lived most of their lives on the other side of the nice, neat boundaries set up by respectable people like you and me. Those gathered have been shut out or cut off from family and community. And so famished, they come desperate to experience community. They seek Jesus out so they can experience how God has been set loose in him and consequently, in them.

Jesus seems intent on surrounding himself with the sick, possessed, disenfranchised, the women and the children... the lowliest of the low...

those held in disdain by the religious authorities of the day. No wonder we find among their accusations that Jesus ate with sinners and drunkards! Yet these persons with whom he associates are all persons who possess hearts torn apart by social custom and standard. They all display that because of the tearing, they now possess a way for God to enter in along the jagged edges, lifting them up to experience little resurrections every day.

It is the resurrection that we remember when we gather about this table: how Jesus died for us breaking his body and spilling his blood. But we also remember and celebrate his glorious resurrection that continues to happen in our lives. So I invite you to stand with your bulletin. Let us bring the story in Mark together with this table. You will take the lead with your script on the front, and I will reply but with slightly different words.

Jesus came.

Jesus gathered with his friends.

Jesus took her by the hand.

Jesus took the bread.

Jesus lifted her up.

Jesus blessed the bread.

She served them.

Jesus served it to his friends.

Let us stand to offer our thanksgiving in song.

Last Sunday afternoon, Lloyd and I went to see the *The Post*. It is mainly the story of *The Washington Post's* reporting of The Pentagon Papers during The Vietnam war, and it the story of Kay Graham who finds herself the owner of the paper after father's death and her husband's suicide. Graham enters boardrooms full of bossy men who refuse to listen to a woman's voice, but when the time comes to make decisions of risky conviction, she does it.

With a rare glimpse into her family life, she sits on the side of her granddaughter's bed and talks to her daughter about why she, Kay, is the way she is. She says something like this:

...when you're told time and time again that you're not good enough, that your opinion doesn't matter as much; when they don't just look past you [but] to them you're not even there...when that's been your reality for so long, it's hard not to let yourself think it's true.

I groaned so loudly that Lloyd put his hand over mine.

When Jesus resurrected Simon's mother-in-law, don't you know she sat on the side of her bed joyously aware that her reality had changed? That all the things her culture had told her about herself (that had made her sick at heart) were false...so that now her service was for the Lord.

Oh friends, of what do we need to be healed?

The heavens have been torn apart to set the goodness of God loose here on earth, and if you are in need of a resurrection, large or small, I hope that you will respond to the good news of the gospel as we stand to sing the hymn of commitment. I will be here at the front to receive any public decisions of faith.