

“And She Got Up, and Began to Serve Them”



I wonder if you know how unique this miracle story is.

Jesus did many miracles, most of them designed to illustrate what He had been teaching. Jesus healed the blind and spoke about opening your eyes to the power and love and truth of God. He healed the deaf and spoke about the deafness of the pharisees. He healed the lame and spoke about how we need to learn to grow in holiness and love. We even learn that Bartimaeus is the name of one of blind men he healed.

But the miracle in the Gospel we have just heard is unique in that we know exactly who the healed person was. Do you remember? It was Peter's mother-in-law.

Jesus had been teaching and healing in the synagogue. His new disciples were impressed, and He was hoping that they would begin to catch on to His Ministry. So, after the service, He and the new disciples were invited back to Peter's home for lunch. A nice touch, you have to admit—Peter wanted to make a good impression on Jesus, and of course, on the other disciples. And, typical male, Peter was hoping that a significant lunch would be ready and waiting.

What a disappointment—mother-in-law sick, and no lunch. Peter is devastated. So much for good impressions. Nothing to do now, but inform Jesus, and make some other plans. But Jesus thinks differently.

Jesus goes into the woman's room, takes her by the hand and heals the fever.

“And she got up, and began to serve them”

Right now, I am going to run into some opposition from the feminists here this morning. “Typical,” you are going to say; “make her well, just so she can go get the men's lunch.”

I want you to know that this is definitely NOT a story about keeping women “back in the kitchen where they belong.”

Let me share with you that I don't think that is what the story is meant to illustrate. Absolutely not.

To me, this story says that Jesus heals us for service. It says we are to be Servants, that your priest is not to be a boss, but to be the servant of all.

I told that idea years ago to members of a parish council, and they were very pleased. They told me that the story meant that I was to be the “servant of the parish, and to do whatever the Parish Council members told me to do.” It made them very happy. And they wanted me to sit down and listen, and then get up and serve them. I had to disappoint them by telling them that that’s not what it means either.

This healing story of Peter’s mother-in-law is meant for all of us, not just for your priest.

All of us are to be Ministers, and all of us are called to Serve.

Please listen to that. Because Jesus wants you, His Church, to hear that today.

To be a servant is to Minister to the needs of others.

We are not called by Jesus to separate ourselves from the world, live in little parish clubs, worshipping God and living in His love. We are called by Jesus to go into the world as Ministers, to minister to the needs of the world around us, to listen and respond to the calls for help, to love them with the love of God Himself.

Now that was not always so. When I was growing up, an Anglican was expected to come to church every Sunday, to pay and pray, to learn the faith and even teach in the Sunday School. We hired priests to do the ministering work on our behalf. In fact, some people of those old days even referred to the priest as the “minister,” because they thought he was the guy who was paid to do the Ministering. What a joke!

We know better now. The Church is made up of 5 groups of people—Bishops, priests, deacons, and Ministers, plus children who are being trained to be Ministers. You in the pews are the Ministers of God. It is your job to minister to the needs of the world. Jesus saves you, redeems you, feeds you, heals you—so that you can get up and serve. That’s the whole point of why He called you. That’s the reason you are Christians. And the priests and deacons are here to minister to you, to support you—so that you can better minister to the world.

You see, the Church is not supposed to be a hierarchy: with some on top, and some in the middle, and some on the bottom. We are all equal in the eyes of God, and all redeemed equally by the blood of Christ. We are all called by God to be His Servants, and your job is to be Ministers to the people around you. Some people call that Total Ministry, and others call it Baptismal Ministry, but the truth is that Jesus raises us up for the sole purpose of Serving. Sure, years from now, we will sit with Him, reigning with Him in Glory—but that’s not yet—that’s in years to come.

Right now, we are “raised up to Serve the world,” to be Ministers to the world where you live, and work, and play.

In all my parishes, I have corrected people when they called me a Minister. In fact, I have sometimes been quite rude about it. “I’m NOT a minister, I would say, I’m a priest. You

are the Ministers; your job is to ‘minister to the needs of the world.’ My job as a priest is to care for you, to feed you with the Blessed Sacrament, to teach you with the Gospel, to heal you with the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Unction—so that you can go out in renewed strength to be better Ministers in the world.”

When did you become Ministers, you ask? Well, some people say that you became a Minister when you were baptised, others say you were ordained a Minister at your Confirmation. And there is a certain logic in the latter idea. You were trained initially in the Sunday School, and the Confirmation Classes, and then brought to the bishop to be ordained as a Minister. In fact, the Sacrament of Confirmation looks just like the Sacrament of Ordination—except the words of the prayers are different—because you are being given a different kind of Ministry.

I doubt if it matters much what theory you follow—the point you need to remember today is that your life as a Christian is to be a Minister of Christ to the world. He works through your hands, He listens through your ears, He speaks through your lips, and He loves through your heart. The closer you can come to Him, the more your Ministry will be like His ministry. The closer you can come to the needs of the people you meet, the deeper and more effective your Ministry can be. The more you live the Gospel in your daily life, the more you will earn the right to share the Saving Gospel of Christ with your friends.

You came here this morning, wounded by the world, discouraged by your seeming failures, hurting from your own sins, drained empty by the Ministry that you have done this week, seeking healing, forgiveness, and support. And this morning, you listened to the authentic words of Scripture, were forgiven by the words of the Absolution, in a few moments you will be fed with the Body and Blood of Jesus, find support from one another, join with the saints and angels in offering the Holy Sacrifice of Christ to our Heavenly Father, and be Blessed with the Blessing of God. And thus, filled up, healed, and refreshed in the Holy Spirit, you will be sent back out into the world to do again the Ministry of God. You are the only Ministers He has. Through you, He will save the world; through you He will build His Kingdom. He has no other plans. Either you are the Ministers of God, or His Ministry will never get done.

That’s why Jesus has died and risen for you. That’s why He formed His Holy Church and called you into it. It is for your Ministry’s sake that He gave Bishops, priests, and deacons to the Church—they are ordained as priests to serve you, so that you can better serve the world.

And that is why, in today’s Gospel, Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law—He raised her up so that she could Serve them. And that is why this morning, Jesus our Saviour heals you, raises you up, strengthens you—it is so that you might Serve—might Minister the love and forgiveness of Christ to the world, might build the Kingdom of God where you live.

Day by day, year by year, you will be faithful Ministers. And one day, you and I will meet in the Wonderful Everlasting Heart of God, and you will hear Him say to you: Well done, good and faithful Minister, enter now into the rest of your Lord. Amen.