

Sermon Notes: February 7, 2021

Focus: Raised to Serve

[All Readings](#)

Today is about Simon's mother-in-law who is healed. I will endeavor to avoid mother-in-law jokes and hope you will see her as a central icon of Mark's gospel. She was raised up by Jesus and served because of Jesus. That is something to which all of us can aspire - of any gender. I am going to give you a framework to understand this essential point in Mark. On page two, I will offer an icon of "raised to serve" in American history. Dr. Rebecca Lee Crumpler was the first female, African-American doctor. On page three, I offer some Greek that a few might enjoy, but these two pages can stand on their own.

Framework of Mark 1 There is symmetry in Mark. There are public and private experiences and as well as rising and serving moments. These parallels bookend Mark's message – God is in the business of raising us up so that we can give ourselves freely to others. We are raised from death to be grateful servants*. In the chapter, before Peter's sick relative v31, angels had served Jesus in the desert v13. Jesus paid forward this kindness by healing men and raising women. Healing is not without cost. But Jesus is aware enough to retreat when necessary, and by the end of Chap 1, he returns to meeting the needs of the world. ** This does not need to look only like "church outreach." You can experience relief from childhood trauma that killed your ability to love (raised) and because of that healing. You now have the ability to give your heart to another (serve).*

Simplistically - *God blesses and we pay it forward.* So often we don't live up to that ideal, but it does not change the centrality of being "raised to serve." That's why I think Peter's mom-in-law is such a clear distillation of God's gift of healing and serving. It's an idea introduced in the desert, continued at the empty tomb, and is still being paid forward to us.

Don't do it corny Mom-in-law jokes about Peter's mother-in-law are so tempting to me. As much as I want to make a breakfast club, Gen X reference about "make me a turkey pot pie," Peter's mom-in-law is not a cheap punchline. She is an icon central to the story of the gospel: *Rising and Serving.* She serves her family after being raised by Jesus. She cares for her guests with exactly the same Greek verb angels use to serve Jesus in the desert. Peter's mother-in-law is the first resurrection story in the gospel. Having been "raised," she "serves" them with holy, tangible acts of love. She actually looks a lot like Jesus himself: *For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life* (Mark 10:45).

Mark 1:31 Peter's mother-in-law understood through Jesus So often when I have preached, I have talked as if Jesus defiles himself to the greater good: He heals on the sabbath, thus breaking the law. He heals lepers, thus breaking purity codes. He heals bleeding women, thus breaking gender boundaries. It is all for a greater good, but somehow defile his humanness. But I wonder how helpful that is for us.

How about this instead? He extends holiness to those previously excluded from holiness. He is less about blurring the lines, and more about drawing people inside the line. Sick and bleeding women as well as broken and diseased men can participate fully in holiness without somehow cheapening holiness. Maybe I am splitting hairs, but Jesus does not lower himself to "their/our" level, but takes all of us by hand and lifts us higher.

Context sidenote These little villages and towns in the Bible were packed and the houses were super close. It didn't take much for the town to gather creating a carnival atmosphere. Following Peter's mom-in-law "resurrection", you get a hint at the enormity of the suffering in the community. "The whole city was gathered around the door". This is not so far removed from 2021, when flash mobs of people line up around a broken freezer to get vaccines.

Modern History

I want to finish with some civil war and reconstruction history that I hope ties in Mark's idea of raised to serve. I hope this person will become an icon for you of loving and healing. February kicked off black history month and it would be easy to riff on MLK or Rosa Parks, but I offer to you another icon of serving: Dr. Rebecca Lee Crumpler (1831-1895).

She was reared by a loving aunt and apprenticed under different doctors from 1852 to 1860, until they recommended her to the New England Female Medical College where she would officially become a doctor. She went to medical school in 1860, soon joining the rank of 54,000 physicians. This is boggling to me, but not surprising.



Three hundred of that 54K were women. How many black women? Just her. Five years later, in the reconstruction period (around 1865) there were (male and female): 22 African Americans who were practicing doctors. Half of these men had served the Union. I won't subject you to the math but that's half, of a half percent that were black medical doctors of any gender at the beginning of reconstruction.

She moved to Richmond, Virginia in 1865 to serve as the ashes of war were settling. She felt Richmond would be "a proper field for real missionary work, and one that would present ample opportunities to become acquainted with the diseases of women and children. The patients she was called to serve were a sea of need. She and her black colleague would never be able to fully treat 30,000 poor and indigent African Americans. This short summary of my understanding comes from here [Wikipage](#) as well a biography from the [changing face of medicine](#). Also, there is a [Boston African American historical site](#) that honors her at the first African American female doctor.

She is a hero, but dang, no one should have to work so hard to help the disenfranchised. If that all feels too chipper and facile for you, I offer an in-depth picture of the misery and systemic hostility she and other reconstruction and later Jim Crow doctors had to swim against. I am not saying your modern doctor is racist, but even today geography and finances still have a disparate impact on the poor African American patient as well as other underserved populations. This following link is more academic and not a quick read, but worth your time if interested. [Segregation in United States Healthcare: From Reconstruction to Deluxe Jim Crow](#)

Dr. Crumpler, like Peter's mother-in-law had been raised to new life and served the voiceless poor with joy. We don't know a ton about her personal life, but I am convinced Jesus took her by the hand, and she responded by serving with abundant love.

Todd

Page 3 Greek addendum

This page contains some things I am working through to understand biblical context. I get into some simplistic Greek as well limited analysis of structure. Turn back now if you're **not** a word nerd. Otherwise, get into the weeds with me.

I think Mark pairs public and private as a way to understand how Jesus operates:

Being served and getting ready

Private prep

1:13 Jesus served by angels

Public prep

1: 17-19 Jesus calls Simon, Andrew, James and John to follow him

Healing and Serving

Public (man)

1:25 Jesus cleanses man with unclean spirit in a synagogue

Private (woman)

1:31 Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law

Public (all people)

1:34 Jesus healed many of various diseases

Private (Jesus retreats)

1:35 Jesus prays alone

Public Jesus (Jesus re-engages)

1:38 Jesus wants to go and preach again

Greek on serving – δῆκόνου diakonein is the verb is used for describing service:

1. The angels who serve Jesus when he is fasting in the desert:

Mark 1:13b "he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him"

- οἱ ἄγγελοι (*angeloi = angels*) **δῆκόνου** (*diakonein -were serving*) αὐτῷ (*auto – to him*)

2. Peter's mother-in-law serves her family

Mark 1:31 (Jesus) took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her, and she began to wait on them.

- καὶ (and) **δῆκόνει** (she began to serve) αὐτοῖς (them)
don't let the different word form throw you, it's just a different conjugation of *δῆκόνου*

3. The women who followed Jesus to his death at the served him

Mark 15:41 "In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs.

- ...αὐτῷ καὶ **δῆκόνου** (they were serving) αὐτῷ (him)

Outside of Mark

when we get to Acts 6 **δῆκόνου** diakonein shows up again but in a different form.

Act 6: Stephen is a "deacon" or table waiter

- Acts 6:2 & 3 "Select seven men from among yourselves to attend (serve) tables"
(I intentionally reversed the sentence order for it to be clear and short- look at Acts 6 directly)
 - **διακονεῖν** (*server - attendant*) *τραπέζαις* (of tables)

Serving is an important way to view the Christian life. If you found the Greek tedious or not helpful, just ignore it, I won't take offense (I won't know if you read it anyway!)