

**Healed to Serve**  
**by Rev. Susan Morrison**  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany  
February 5, 2006

**Isaiah 40: 28 -31**

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Our God is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. God does not faint or grow weary; God's understanding is unsearchable. <sup>29</sup>God gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. <sup>30</sup>Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; <sup>31</sup>but those who wait for God shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

**Mark 1:29-39**

<sup>29</sup>Upon leaving the synagogue, Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup>Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and immediately they told Jesus about her. <sup>31</sup>Jesus went over to her, took her by the hand and helped her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

<sup>32</sup>That evening, at sundown, they brought to Jesus all who were sick or possessed with demons. <sup>33</sup>Everyone in the town crowded around the door. <sup>34</sup>Jesus cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. But Jesus would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew who he was.

<sup>35</sup>Rising early in the morning, Jesus went off to a lonely place in the desert, and prayed there. <sup>36</sup> Simon and his companions hunted for Jesus. <sup>37</sup>When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." <sup>38</sup>Jesus said to them, "Let us move on to the neighboring villages, so that I may proclaim the Good News there also. That is what I have come to do." <sup>39</sup>So Jesus went into their synagogues proclaiming the Good News and expelling demons throughout the whole of Galilee.

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(Placing the head scarf on my head, I assume the role of Peter's mother-in-law and step into the congregation saying.....)

My daughter married a fisherman named Simon Peter. Some called him Simon. Jesus called him Peter, or Cephas, which means rock. I always called him Simon Peter.

My daughter and Simon Peter settled down in Capernaum where they both had been raised. They had their own home and as I grew older and widowed, they invited me to live with them in their place. It was there that I first met Jesus.

He had come to town that day, arriving on the shores of the Sea of Galilee early in the morning. It was the Sabbath and he went to the synagogue with these fishermen friends who had seemingly gone crazy over their admiration for this man from Nazareth. I heard that while he was in the synagogue, he taught with authority and even cast out unclean spirits from one who had been possessed. Word spread quickly in our little town. Everyone was talking about this man named Jesus. Somehow he had the power to cause everyone to be filled with astonishment and awe.

After the synagogue services were over, my son-in-law Simon Peter and his brother Andrew brought Jesus home with them. Everyone was ebullient. Except for me. I had taken ill with a fever. I think that I had become ill out of sheer worry about my daughter and my grandchildren since her husband, Simon Peter and his brother, Andrew, had gone off half crazed after this person Jesus. The family fishing business was going to be sold. How were we going to live? Fear and worry consumed me to the point of making me ill.

I overheard Simon Peter telling Jesus that I was in bed and ill. The next thing I knew, Jesus came over to me, took my hand and helped me up. The minute he reached for my hand and raised me up I could feel the fever leave my body. I was healed. Made whole. I was in awe. This Jesus was just like the Messiah that we all had been waiting for. He had the power to heal, the authority to teach, the presence of God.

Immediately, I joined my daughter in serving our guest. Astonished by my new strength and energy, I felt that I had been healed to serve – not just dinner that night, but serve this Jesus in a way that would further his ministry. Little did I know how much I would serve Him in the days to come. As Simon Peter's devotion to Jesus grew, it took him all over the region. Later, after the amazing Good Friday death and Easter morn resurrection experiences, my daughter joined Peter in travels to Corinth and other cities in the region to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. I stayed home and cared for the children and opened up our home for worship and study. Many converts came to believe in Jesus as their Savior right here by our hearth.

It wasn't until years later that I realized that I was the first woman whom Jesus healed. I was a "nobody" in society, devalued by those who had authority, yet Jesus saw me as a daughter of God. My physical illness was not a complicated one, but in this relatively "minor" healing, Jesus overturned society's view of women. I, too, became one of his devoted followers.

To this day, I believe that I was healed to serve.

(Changing the position of the head scarf and turning it into an apron, I continue....)

My name is Edie McPherson. My son is Dan McPherson who lives in Beverly and the Harbormaster in that North Shore town. Many of you might know Dan. He married Cathy Murphy. I was Cathy's mother-in-law.

Little did I know eight years ago, that I would be healed to serve. You see I had grown very tired. I had lost my energy and found it hard to breathe. I was living in Moultonboro, New Hampshire at the time and my children insisted that I check in with a doctor. The doctor did a number of tests and discovered that I had a valve in my heart that was not functioning. I knew that open heart surgery would be risky. I prayed about what I should do. I decided to put my life in God's hands and go forward with the surgery. It was a long, difficult ordeal, but slowly, little by little I gained back my strength and my life. It was just about when I was feeling good-as-new that Cathy was diagnosed with breast cancer. I knew right then that I had been healed for a purpose. She and Dan had an 8 year old daughter, Jenna, that needed loving attention. I was able to be there for her when Cathy was so sick from her cancer treatments.

And then, many of you know who met Cathy here at Holy Trinity, that this fall, her cancer returned. There were lesions up and down her spine. She was in so much pain. But I had been healed to serve and so I moved right in with them in their house in Beverly. Throughout these past months when Cathy couldn't drive or climb stairs or do much of anything, I was able to cook and clean, shop and run errands, take Jenna to her soccer games, make sure that she did her homework. I would drive Cathy to her radiation treatment and often we'd stop for a bite to eat on the way home.

Then two weeks ago she became disoriented. The doctors discovered that what had seemed like the flu was actually pneumonia and her brain wasn't getting enough oxygen. Dan took her to the hospital. There, her condition worsened and became very grave. She was on life support. But again, I knew that I had been healed to serve because while Dan spent day and night at her side in the hospital, I was here, at home, with Jenna. And when Dan called last Sunday night to say that Rev. Susan had anointed Cathy with oil and that he, and Cathy's mom and Susan Webb were gathered around the bedside praying as Cathy made the journey from this life to the next, it was I who held Jenna and together we wept.

I used to think that I was a nobody. But now I know that I am a daughter of God. And God healed me so that I might serve and be in ministry to those whom God loves.

(Remove apron and stand behind the communion table.)

When we come to the communion table, we come for many reasons. We come out of joy and thanksgiving for the gift of Jesus Christ in our lives, in our church, in our community and in our world. We come, seeking to be forgiven for all of the ways that we have been out of step with God. We come to be healed, restored, renewed in body, mind and spirit.

And then we leave the table, eager and ready to serve – to be the disciples that Jesus' calls us to be. Whether it is to serve in our own family or to serve at work or at school or here at church, we are healed to serve. We are called by name and sent out to confront oppression and injustice anywhere and everywhere. It is risky business. It calls for sacrifice and faithfulness to a God who loves us and partners with us to heal a broken world.

And so, as we feast at the table, let us pray....

Bread of Life, feed my soul.

Stir your Spirit, make me whole.

Then will I follow where you lead

Stretch out my hand to those in need,

Let the world be healed and whole

Bread of life, feed my soul.

We are healed to serve. Thanks be to God. Amen.