

Sermon for Sunday, February 4, 2024 (Cub Scout Sunday)

Last week, we heard a story of healing, one that occurred in a very public place – the synagogue – with the banishment of unclean spirits that possessed a person. The unclean spirits – sometimes called demons in some translations – actually recognized Jesus for who he was, to the astonishment of everyone, including the disciples.

Today we also have healing, but it's very different. It's a family setting. Simon Peter's mother-in-law has fallen ill, and Jesus takes her hand and she is healed. Her fever leaves her, just as the unclean spirits left the possessed man, but it feels different. There's an intimacy about this moment, isn't there? He touches her. It's not like the possessed man, where there is no physical contact. In that case, Jesus has healed in a way that does not cause him to be ritually unclean. In this case, the family rules apply: we do what we can to help those to whom we are close. And having been healed, this woman gets up and serves them. It's a lesson in a small sentence: the proper response to God's grace is to share it by serving others. That word "serve" is stated in Greek as "*Diaikonen*". The root for the word "deacon", a ministry of service to others.

Simon Peter's mother is an icon of resurrection and a model of Christian ministry.

We pay attention to this story today, especially, as we welcome and celebrate our Cub Scout troop. Even at their young age, this boys and girls are here today serving as helpers in our worship service. They have been given the opportunity to learn and to grow in the many ways that are part of the wonderful Cub Scout program, and they model for us what it looks like to be followers of the One who

taught us that serving and helping is what we are all called to do, and that we keep on learning what that means all of our lives.

This healing of a family member is a lovely moment, an intimate one, but we also notice that in response to the healing, extended family members and neighbors bring all the folks in their circle of love who are in need of healing. Jesus responds as he always does, by helping in a thousand different ways. The intimacy of immediate family is broadened to the larger family, all those who are brought to Jesus. The intimacy of the fun and learning and service of the Cub Scout den is broadened to the larger community when they do service projects appropriate to their age and abilities. Today is a time when we celebrate our Cub Scouts, and it also a chance for us to remember that our parish family is larger than the names in our parish directory – it is a reminder that just as the Cubs are part of our parish family and community, they extend our reach and broaden our possibilities for service throughout the Petersburg area. And so we celebrate them and we learn what Jesus taught us: we are all called to be instruments of healing and helping, using our God-given gifts and abilities. It's what Jesus did and it's what we all seek to do as we follow him.

May we be as energetic as Cub Scouts, as patient as their parents, as creative as their leaders, and as oriented toward bettering our community as they all are. May we be as generous as the Cameron Foundation, which funded this project so more youngsters could participate without barriers. May we agents of change, as we know each of these children will be, as we seek what will make this community a better place. And may God bless us in this holy diaconal work, this day and always.

Amen.