

## **Mark 1:29-39**

<sup>29</sup>As soon as [Jesus and the disciples] left the synagogue, they 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 they told him about her at once. <sup>31</sup>He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

<sup>32</sup>That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. <sup>33</sup>And the whole city was gathered around the door. <sup>34</sup>And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

<sup>35</sup>In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup>And Simon and his companions hunted for him. <sup>37</sup>When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." <sup>38</sup>He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." <sup>39</sup>And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Grace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

When Izzy was 4 years-old she came home from preschool one afternoon and said – “Mommy, can you teach me to cook like you?” “Well sure, baby,” I replied. “You can help mommy now and when you get a little older, I’ll teach you all of my ways.”

“No mommy!” she stated emphatically – “I need to learn now. Because ladies are supposed to know how to cook. We have to feed the mens.”

I stared at her for a stunned few seconds and then said: “Ummmmm – WHHHHHAAAAT?!?!?! Who told you told you that???” Apparently, it was one of the teacher’s aids who was trying to be funny when some of the children were playing with the play kitchen, and told the little girls that it was their job to cook for the little boys.

You may or may not know this about me, but I LOVE to cook. I’ll cook for anyone, any day, anytime. Male or female. The more the merrier. Seriously – I pretty much always cook enough for a small army. I am a woman who loves to cook!

However, I'm sure you know me well enough to know just how NOT-happy I was to have my 4-year-old thinking that there were strictly assigned tasks that each gender is **required** to live into.

Especially since her lack of cooking skills had incited some kind of panic. I know plenty of women who are amazing chefs and I know plenty of women who are terrible at cooking. I also know plenty of men who are terrible at cooking and plenty of men who are amazing chefs. Seriously, can you imagine the Food Network without Alton Brown? Because I cannot!

I found out later that her concern was related to a little boy named Brandon. Turns out, at 4, these two were planning a life of domestic bliss together. According to Brandon's mother, he was planning to give Izzy "the promise ring."

Izzy thought that her lack of ability to cook, at age 4, would somehow impact their future together. Sadly, these two were no Paris and Helen of Troy. Once they went off to different elementary schools, their preschool love faded.

Our Gospel text this morning is a bit of a transitional piece. In this time following Epiphany, we have been hearing stories of Jesus establishing himself; he's proclaimed God's message that the kingdom of heaven is near and began recruiting his disciples to accompany him and help him in his ministry. Last week this ministry began when he healed the man plagued by the unclean spirit.

Directly following that encounter, Jesus and his disciples leave the Synagogue and go to the house of Simon and Andrew where Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law who was bedridden with a fever. Upon her healing she gets up and begins to serve them.

Apparently, word gets around because later that evening people in the city start bringing anyone who is sick or possessed by some kind of a demon (or vice that controls them) to Jesus for healing. He heals them all and once again, prevents the demons from speaking because they know who he is.

The next morning, before the sun has risen, Jesus goes someplace that is solitary to pray. He is hunted down by his disciples and they tell him that everyone is looking for him. (Well duh, they all want some more miraculous healing.)

Jesus tells them that they will be going on to neighboring towns to proclaim God's message there also. Because that is what he came to do. He came to proclaim God's message to many places, not just one village. We have transitioned from the build up – to the actual action.

And there is a lot of action happening as we transition in this text. It almost feels like 3 separate stories all crammed together. As I read and reflected on this text this week, one thing kept leaping out at me as I read the story. And that one thing caused me to have a similar reaction to when Izzy told me she needed to learn to cook for the mens. –

Ummmm.... WHAT?

Jesus healed the mother-in-law of Simon so she could serve them?  
Man, that just reeks of – “Hey woman, go make me a sammich.”  
Seriously?

Matt Skinner wrote: “There’s something about Mark 1:31 that makes audiences bristle. Why is the healed woman’s first response to *serve* Jesus and his four disciples? When we learn that ‘serve’ translates *diakoneo*, most likely indicating food service, and means she ‘waited on’ them, it doesn’t help. Why didn’t Simon tell his mother-in-law to take it easy while he made the sandwiches this time?” Why indeed???

Upon further reflection, there’s a lot more going on. Although societal norms today don’t dictate culinary skills strictly along gender lines, in Ancient Palestine, they did. Women were the ones who attended to the domestic needs of the household. And they did this communally.

It was the right and privilege of the senior woman in the household to present and/or serve what all of the women of the household had created together. Showing this hospitality to important guests was a matter of honor and privilege, not servitude.

Additionally – the fact that she was immediately able to get up and take on these duties speaks to her complete and miraculous recovery. She didn’t need to take it easy – she was well.

Some translations of this text say she got up and **ministered** to them. Providing for their needs out of gratitude and to reflect the love that she had received to the entire household.

Sarah Henrich noted in her commentary reflection that the verb used to describe this service is the same verb that Jesus uses to describe his own ministry of service.

She also states that: “Simon Peter’s mother-in-law is far from being an exemplar of a pathetic, un-liberated woman for whom serving men is her whole life. Rather she is the FIRST character in Mark’s gospel who exemplifies true discipleship.”

So, this wasn’t an act of servitude, but of gratitude. And honor. And respect. She wasn’t cooking for the mens out of expectation or obligation, or hope for “the promise ring,” but as an outward sign of her discipleship. Of her love.

This really isn’t much different than the outward signs of our discipleship – we serve one another and our community in many different ways – Faith Formation, Social Outreach, Justice Actions,

Music Ministries, and Worship just to name a few. We also act in response to the love that we have received from God, which unlike Izzy and Brandon's preschool love, will never fade. And this active love that we exude is not something we do out of obligation. We act out of gratitude.

Rather than fixate on what originally seemed to be horrible gender stereotyping, instead, let us give thanks that we received this shining example of faith in action from Simon's mother-in-law, so that we too can live as people of action on our journeys of discipleship. We too can reflect God's love to the world, just as Simon's mother-in-law reflected her Jesus' love to that entire household. Amen.