

I remember one summer as a young teen sitting outside at night and looking up at the night sky. My brother and my parents and I were patiently and expectantly waiting for glimpses of the meteor shower that was expected to happen that night. As I searched the heavens for moving bits of light, it seemed like the longer I looked at the sky, the more stars I could see. I tried to count the number of stars in just a small section but quickly realized there were more stars than I had the patience to count. I remember feeling an utter sense of amazement at the vastness of the night sky.

A number of videos have been circulating for the last few years that attempt to show the incredible vastness and complexity of the universe and our place in it. One video called "The Cosmic Eye" begins with a woman laying on a patch of grass. As the image zooms out, our perspective gets bigger and bigger moving from the one woman to the neighborhood, the surrounding city, eventually the entire planet comes into view. But then the video keeps going. The image keeps zooming out. The earth gets smaller and the moon comes into view, then the surrounding planets, then outer planets, dwarf planets, neighboring stars, and after only a minute or so, the entire Milky Way galaxy comes into view. But the video continues. Soon we see neighboring galaxies, the galaxy group and the local supercluster, then the cosmic web, and lastly the uniform universe.

I can only imagine how Isaiah might have re-written our scripture for this morning if he had been able to see that video. Isaiah imagines God inhabiting the earth's horizon stretching out the sky like a curtain. He invites us to look up at the sky and wonder who created the stars. *Don't you know? Isaiah asks. Haven't you heard? The Lord is bigger, and stronger, and more impossible to comprehend than you can possibly imagine!* We are reminded that we are but grasshoppers when compared to the immensity of God's creation. This is both an awe-inspiring and humbling thought. I remember that as I stared up into the night sky searching for meteors, I was suddenly struck by my smallness. What did I matter, as one person in the great scheme of the entire universe?

The story of Jesus in our scripture from Mark this morning paints the picture from a different perspective. In Jesus we see the nature of God expressed in human form. Jesus and the first four disciples James, John, Andrew, and Simon (who later becomes

Peter), have just left the synagogue in Capernaum. In the synagogue Jesus delivered his first sermon and healed a man possessed by an unclean spirit. They leave the synagogue and go to the nearby home of Simon and Andrew. It is unclear how long Simon and Andrew have been away from their home but in that time, Simon's mother-in-law has become ill with a fever. They immediately tell Jesus that she is sick. The text says that Jesus took her hand and raised her up. The choice of words here is extremely interesting and rather important. Mark doesn't write that Jesus helped her stand up or that he helped her to her feet. The phrase used is that he raised her up. The Greek word used here is *egeirō* [eh-GUY-row] which can simply mean to awaken or to get up, but it is also the same word used by the angel in Mark 16:6 when he says to the women at the tomb "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen!" In a very real sense, Jesus gives Simon's mother-in-law a type of resurrection. She is given new life.

How does she respond to this gift? She begins to serve. Now the feminist in me initially recoiled at this part of the story. I imagined the woman putting on her apron and heading into the kitchen to making dinner for the men. The service she responds with is not domestic service. The Greek word translated here as "serve" is *diakoneō* which is most often translated as "to minister." *Diakoneō* is where we get the English word deacon – someone in the church who serves in some capacity to minister to other people. The woman's fever is gone, she is raised to new life, and she responds by ministering to those around her.

At this point word has spread about Jesus and it feels like the entire city is at the door looking for hope and healing. Jesus attends to the them, healing those who are sick and relieving those who are possessed of the evil that grips them. Jesus, the incarnation of the nature of God, a God who created the vastness of the earth, the night sky, the galaxies, the superclusters, and the ever-expanding universe, touches and heals and shows love and care for Simon's mother in law and for the beloved children of God who are gathered in hopes of also being raised up to new life. Our God of the cosmos is also the God of compassion.

But as incredible and compassionate as Jesus is, he is also human. And after resting from a long and what must have been exhausting day, he awakens early and heads out to a private place to pray. The scripture doesn't give us any details about what Jesus prayed about or if there was something specific he was contemplating with God out in the desert. I imagine that after the day he just experienced, his first full day of public ministry, Jesus might have been feeling a little overwhelmed. Maybe he needed assurance for God that he could keep going. Maybe he remembered our text from Isaiah: "those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength; they will fly up on wings like eagles; they will run and not be tired; they will walk and not be weary." I also wonder if Jesus was uncertain about what to do next.

After a good amount of time alone and in prayer it seems that Jesus has reached some clarity. He has to keep moving. Yes, there are still people in Capernaum who could be healed and who could benefit from his ministry, but if he stayed there, his message would stay there too. Jesus saw the bigger picture. His ministry was both healing AND peaching. He didn't continue on to neighboring towns only to preach or only to heal, but to do both. Jesus also knew he could not meet the needs of the people in the cities and towns of Galilee, much less the needs of the world, by himself, nor would he be able to bring wholeness to the world in his short lifetime. We learn later that after spending some time with Jesus, observing and participating in his ministry, Jesus commissions his disciples to go out in pairs and minister to people themselves.

Like Simon's mother-in-law, like the disciples, like Jesus, we too are called to minister to the children of God. We too must attend to both the big picture and to the needs of individuals. Our God is both a God of the cosmos, and a God of deep compassion for each of us as her beloved children - cosmos and compassion. As we are renewed and given new life by Christ, how will we respond? We are the hands and feet of Christ on earth. Each one of us is invited to respond to the good news of God by ministering to others by offering whatever healing we can, by seeking justice as we name and casting out the evils in our world, and by proclaiming the good news of hope and love for all. May it be so. Amen.