

Freed From or Freed For?

Mark 1: 29-39 (February 4, 2018)

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29As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34And 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.

Historical Context

The ancients did not believe that all illnesses were demonically caused. They knew that people get sick for all manner of reasons. But, illness bore a heavy social cost: not only would a person be unable to earn a living or contribute to the well-being of a household, but their ability to take their proper role in the community, to be honored as a valuable member of a household or village, would be taken from them. Simon's mother-in-law is an excellent case in point. It was her calling and her honor to show hospitality to guests in her home. Cut off from that role by an illness cut her off from doing that which integrated her into her world. Jesus restored her to her social world and brought her back to a life of value by freeing her from that fever. It is very important to see that healing is about restoration to community and restoration of a calling, a role as well as restoration to life. For life without community and calling is bleak indeed.

Theme: Freed From or Freed For?

What did those from whom demons were cast out do after their healing? What did all the people Jesus heals in this week's story do once they are freed from the various ailments of mind, body, and spirit that had captivated them? Some, I imagine, were simply so grateful to be made well – so grateful, that is, that they had been freed from something debilitating or destructive – that they returned as quickly as possible to their old lives and routines and relationships. But some, including Simon's mother-in-law, recognize that they weren't only freed from something, they were also freed *for* something, for lives of purpose and meaning and service and generosity and more.

There is a distinction between being freed *from* things that hold us back and being freed *for* many more things. What things might you be freed for? What – or who – needs you this week?

The quotation from Frederick Buechner describes those opportunities we are freed *for*: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."