

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Open a bible and place several unlit vigil lights around it.

**LEADER:** Let us each light a candle and name someone who is sick.

*Name them aloud.*

**LEADER:** Compassionate God, keep in your love those we love who are sick.

**ALL:** In your mercy and loving kindness you leave no tear unheeded, no joy unnoticed. Amen.

Peter's mother-in-law survives in the oral traditions of the early Church and claims two verses in Mark's written gospel. We don't know her name. She seems insignificant compared to Jesus, her healer. The gospel is his story and his message. News of Jesus lifting her up spreads in Sunday's gospel.

Few women studied scripture and theology before Vatican II. A few women got doctorates at the School of Theology that Sister Madeleva Wolff started at St Mary's College, Notre Dame, in the 1940s. Feminist pioneer Mary Daly, who wrote the *Church and the Second Sex*, earned her first doctorate there. After Vatican II, theology schools opened to women who paid more attention to the women in the gospels.

# SUNDAY

## by SUNDAY

Women scholars developed two tools for reclaiming women's place in the early Christian communities. Tool 1 is suspicion: Suspect the gospel narrative doesn't tell the whole story but has the author's male point of view. Tool 2: Bring women from the margin of significance to the center of study. Resist and question interpretations that trivialize or dismiss women.

In the United States women's work to end slavery developed into the suffrage movement and culminated in the 19th Amendment that gave women the right to vote in 1920. Along with the civil rights and anti-war movements in the sixties, a second wave of the women's movement arose,

mainly among white women. A third wave developed as woman of many cultures around the world joined in the struggle for equal rights.

In theology African American women created womanist theologies; Latinas created *mujerista* theologies. As women claimed their voices internationally, they also claimed their cultures and recognized we all speak from where we stand, from our own experiences and struggles. Their work generated liberation theologies that reflect women's struggles where they live.

● How might lifting up women benefit the Church today? Your parish?



Network, a Catholic lobbying group, joins in May Day support for women workers.

PhotoNetwork Lobby for Catholic Social Teaching

# GOSPEL

## Why has Jesus come among us?

**NARRATOR 1:** Immediately after leaving the synagogue, Jesus went to the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John.

**SIMON:** Jesus, my mother-in-law is sick in bed with a fever.

**NARRATOR 1:** Jesus went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her immediately, and she began to serve them.

**NARRATOR 2:** When the sun set that evening, people brought all who were sick or possessed by demons to Jesus. The whole city crowded at the door. Jesus healed people of various diseases and cast out demons. He did not allow the demons to speak because they knew him.

**NARRATOR 3:** Getting up while it was still dark the next morning, Jesus went out to a deserted place to pray. Simon and the others with him tracked Jesus down.

**SIMON:** Everyone is looking for you.

**JESUS:** Let's go to the neighboring villages so that I can proclaim the good news there also. This is why I have come.

**NARRATOR 3:** Jesus continued to proclaim the good news in synagogues in all of Galilee and to cast out demons.

Mark 1.29-39



● Who do you know with an urgency to serve, heal, and free people?

Peter's mother-in-law becomes Jesus' first woman disciple, an anonymous but significant woman who models more than making brunch for her son-in-law's new friends. The *New American Bible* version of Sunday's gospel, which Catholics hear at worship, translates her story: "Jesus approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up. Then the fever left her, and she waited on them" (Mark 1.31).

The word the *New American Bible* translates *helped* is the Greek word *egeiro*, which means *to raise up*. This is the same word that Mark uses to describe Jesus' own resurrection. Before his arrest, Jesus promises, "After I am *raised up*, I will go before you to Galilee" (14.28). The young man in the empty tomb tells the three women who come to anoint Jesus' body, "He has been *raised*; he is not here" (16.6).

Mark also uses this same word to describe Jesus' actions

## Jesus raises up a woman disciple.

Mark narrates a day and a half in Jesus' ministry this Sunday. Jesus raises up Peter's mother-in-law after he preaches on the Sabbath in the Capernaum synagogue and frees a man of an unclean spirit. After sunset, a new day begins. Sick and possessed people crowd his door. He heals and frees them, repeating for many what he has done for the two individuals.

This is Mark's storytelling technique. The first evangelist dramatizes the dynamic inbreaking of God's healing, liberating power in Jesus' ministry by following two stories

in which Jesus helps individuals with a summary scene.

Early the next morning Jesus goes out to pray. The disciples whom he sought out and called only a day earlier now seek him. In fact, they tell him, "Everyone is looking for you." Jesus sets off with them to do in neighboring villages what he has done in Capernaum, again expanding the story. Jesus is at work doing what he came to do—to bring God near and touch people with his healing and liberating power.

● How is Mark's busy, energetic, and prayerful portrait of Jesus like or unlike your own?

in other miracle stories. Jesus commands the paralyzed man whose sins he forgives before he heals his paralysis, “*Arise*, take up your cot and walk” (2.11). He commands Jairus’s daughter, whose family perceives her to be dead, “*Arise*” (5.41). Jesus takes an epileptic boy by the hand and *raises* him up (9.27), just as he does Peter’s mother-in-law.

Mark repeats the word and gesture of raising people up to connect Jesus’ resurrection with his healings. God’s same life-giving power raises up Jesus from the dead and raises up the sick.

- What meanings does to *lift up* or *raise up* have?
- What connection do you see between Jesus’ miracles and his resurrection?

**T**he *New American Bible* translates the Greek word *diakonie* as “began to wait on.” The word means *serve*. The word *deacon* comes from this same word. The word can mean providing for physical needs and serving the table. In Mark’s gospel Jesus gives the word *serve* additional meaning when he equates serving with giving one’s life. He says of himself, “For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (10.45).

Peter’s mother-in-law responds to Jesus’ act of raising her up by serving him. She becomes a disciple who gives herself. In fact, in this story



The basalt walls of homes from Jesus’ time remain in Capernaum. A modern church has been built on top of the remains of Peter’s house.

the disciples and Jesus are those who come to be served and Peter’s mother-in-law is the model disciple. She does the same service Jesus twice carries out in Mark’s gospel when he feeds multitudes.

Peter’s mother-in-law is the first woman disciple in Mark’s gospel, but not the only one. Mark tells us that many women witness Jesus’ crucifixion, standing at a distance. All of Jesus’ men disciples have fled (14.50) or in Peter’s case, denied him (14.66-72). Mark names three of the women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome, but says there are many.

Gospel tradition gives these women little space but important credentials. Like Peter’s mother-in-law, these women serve Jesus. Like the four fishermen whom Jesus called, these women follow Jesus. They come with him from Galilee to Jerusalem (15.40-41). Perhaps Peter’s mother-in-law is one of the

anonymous women disciples who follow and serve Jesus to the end.

- What do you see at stake in recognizing women among Jesus’ disciples?
- What does Peter’s mother-in-law exemplify for you?
- Who models a discipleship of service that you try to follow in your life?

**B**esides raising up Peter’s mother-in-law and healing myriad sick people, Jesus seeks time to pray in Sunday’s gospel. Galilee is rural. He probably climbs the hills that rise behind Capernaum and finds a rock to sit on beneath the stars before dawn. Perhaps it is breezy in this place when it is usually hot and humid all day.

- Where do you find such a place to be alone with God and creation?

## Job laments his life.

The story of Job is familiar. God and Satan, who is one of the angels in God’s court, put Job to the test to see if an upright and innocent man will remain faithful if God takes from him all the evidence of God’s goodness—all his riches and children. This Old Testament book explores what happens when bad things happen to good people.

Job loses his oxen, sheep, camels, servants, and children. His experience takes him outside the norm of people’s expectations. How can anyone suffer such losses without reason? His friends come to talk and search out his blame. Job holds to the truth of his own experience; he is blameless. The story fractures the equation: prosperity equals God’s blessing; misery equals God’s punishment for sin.

In Sunday’s first reading, Job vividly describes his suffering. God does not speak to Job in his affliction and anguish until chapter 38, though Job presses to know why these things have happened to him. God’s response is a question, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?”

Job must live in the mystery of life and the mystery of God’s love, which is more than a simple system of reward and

punishment. Jesus continues this story. In him, God comes among us, suffers with us, and creates a future with us.

### Life is empty.

**Do not human beings have a hard service on earth?**

**Are not their days like those of a laborer?**

**Like a slave who longs for the shadow and laborers who look for their wages, so am I allotted months of emptiness; nights of misery are apportioned to me.**

**When I lie down, I say, “When shall I arise?”**

**But the night is long, and I am full of tossing until dawn.**

**My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle and come to their end without hope.**

**Remember that my life is like a breath; my eye will never again see good.**

Job 7.1-4,6-7

- How do Job’s words fit your life?
- When have events in your life taken you beyond what friends can help you understand and into mystery you must live?

- How have you experienced God or Jesus with you in times of suffering and loss?

## PRAY

Think of people you know who need healing and liberation. Pray Psalm 147 for them.

**1:** God rebuilds Jerusalem and gathers the scattered of Israel.

**2:** God heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

**1:** God counts the stars and calls each by name.

**2:** Our God is gracious; God’s wisdom is without limit.

*Extinguish the candles and share a greeting of peace and support with each other.*



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## DO SOMETHING



- Visit Network, a national Catholic social justice lobby, to follow issues in Congress and advocate for the least. Their website provides an easy way to communicate with legislators on issues up for vote.
- Consider as a group putting on a meal that mixes insiders and outsiders in your parish or neighborhood.