

Scripture

Isaiah 40:21-31

Psalm 147

1 Corinthians 9:16 - 23

Mark 1:29-39

For this is what I came here to do

How many of us have ever thought of Jesus as an exorcist? The last two week's Gospel readings from Mark depict Jesus as an effective exorcist - casting out demons and healing the sick.

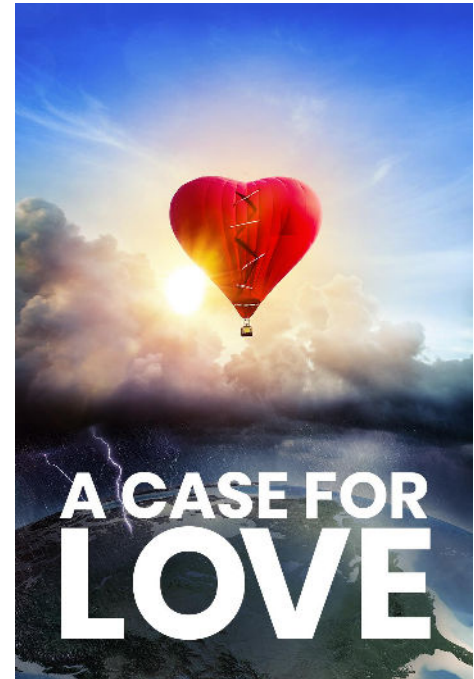
I never watched the movie "The Exorcist" and frankly until we began our Epiphany journey in the Gospel of Mark, didn't think of Jesus as an Exorcist.

If you accept the definition of an exorcist as one who casts out demons, then Jesus was one. The first few examples of his public ministry are depicted by Mark as exorcisms.

So what is Exorcism? Multiple definitions reside on the Internet. Casting out of demons is the most prevalent definition. Returning a person to wholeness - the desired state - is a more subtle definition of exorcism.

"Jesus lifted up Simon's mother in law and the fever left her." Would that our practical application of medicine were as effective as Jesus'!

Jesus' healing restored people to wholeness - wholeness physically, mentally and with God. To Jesus, healing meant encouraging wholeness of body, mind and spirit.



Jesus continued his ministry by preaching in the synagogues and healing the sick and the lame. It's interesting to understand the similarity between the words healing and salvation.

to Jesus, these processes of healing and saving souls were one and the same. “And he went through Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.”

Jesus restored our understanding that illness - a state of un-wholeness is NOT God's punishment for those who had sinned.

Healing, to Jesus, consisted of restoring someone to wholeness. Many times, Jesus healed through touch. When Jesus encountered Simon's mother in law, “he came and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.”

Throughout the Bible, there are many instances when the touch of another human being heals the one who is troubled, ill or infirmed.

As humans, created in the image of God, Jesus' healing helped us understand the importance of physical touch or intimacy as a way of conveying God's love for us.

I am by nature a hugger. It was difficult during the long months of the pandemic to greet those I loved with a just a smile, an elbow or a fist bump. During my chaplaincy internship in the hospital, during the pandemic, masks were required and physical touch verboten. Through that experience, I learned to convey God's love and healing presence through my eyes. The only portion of my face that was visible about the mask.

We avoided physical contact out of fear of contagion. Yet the months of separation have created a society that doesn't know how to reconnect. Isolation leads to loneliness, despair and sometimes suicide.

So Jesus began his public ministry offering healing through touch and prayer. He also demonstrated through these actions the importance of community to keep people whole and right with God.

PC Ennis, a Presbyterian theologian, cites Dr. May's observation during his interpretation of the Gospel of Mark

Gerald May, a doctor who practices psychotherapy in Washington DC, perceived the importance of community in healing.

"The power of Grace is nowhere as brilliant or as mystical as in communities of faith. Its power includes not just love that comes from people and through people but love that pours forth among people, as if through the very space between one person and next. Just to be in such an atmosphere is to be bathed in healing power."

Think about the many times you have come here (Saint Paul/Saint Luke) and experienced the healing love of your fellow parishioners. Perhaps you encountered us at the hospital or at the grave, experiencing the loss of your lifelong companion. But to look up and see the love on a friend's face, to feel their warm embrace, can remind us that we are loved completely by God.

This is the gift of faith played out in community.

Last Tuesday, many of us went to see a new film inspired by the loving leadership of our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry. **A Case for Love** documented 7 different case studies when people demonstrated unselfish love for others.

We are living in a time when love seems lost. When people express hate and are violent to those who don't look or act like them. The only way to overcome these sinful ways is to offer unselfish love. Agape love that doesn't expect anything in return. Love that when given away returns tenfold.

One of the families we met through the film consisted of two parents who were educators, and their adult daughter who also worked in schools. The daughter learned of a refugee family that needed a place to stay. The refugee mother and her children didn't speak English and didn't have a place to live. The family of three educators took them in and provided childcare while their mother looked for work.

The movie showed scenes of the two families laughing and eating meals together. The daughter noted that when the refugee family joined theirs, they experienced a depth and breadth of love that they didn't know existed.

As we strive to follow Jesus more closely during the season of Lent, we can repent for our sins and pray that God will give us the opportunity to love one another more deeply in new and unselfish ways.

This is what WE came here to do by following Jesus, an incarnation of the God who created us and who loves us still. By sharing gifts of unselfish love, God's love becomes manifest.

Amen.