

“Living With Limitations”

First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
February 4, 2018

Old Testament lesson: Psalm 34:15-19

New Testament lesson: Mark 1:29-39

Hugh Jackman and Michelle Williams lead the cast of the Golden Globe nominated movie *The Greatest Showman*. Jackman plays PT Barnum, the 19th century showman who turned a ragtag group of misfits into the Barnum and Bailey Circus, the Greatest Show on Earth.

In doing so, people like the Dog-Faced Boy, the Siamese Twins, the Three-Legged Man, the Bearded Lady, and a dwarf known as Gen. Tom Thumb turned their deformities into assets.

Of course, that's not as miraculous as the transformations Jesus brought to the people of Galilee, people who were suffering from leprosy, uncontrollable bleeding, blindness, withered hands and feet, and in the case of Simon's mother-in-law, a deadly fever.

And yet, in both cases – with the people from PT Barnum's show and the people healed by Jesus, they were able to overcome the terrible circumstances that made their lives difficult if not unbearable.

We all have things that are unmanageable in life – those things that get in the way of us being who we feel called to be or achieving what we know would be a blessing for us and others.

Often, the solution is not what we think. The people of PT Barnum's amazing sideshows didn't need to change who they were to overcome life's barriers. They just needed to accept who they were, and to put that to work for them. Likewise, we need to channel who we are toward the greater good, in fulfillment of God's plan and purpose.

We see this in how Jesus approached his earliest days of ministry among the people of Galilee. We don't often think of Jesus facing burdens, but he did. Not only did he face the burden of carrying our sins to the cross and beyond, Jesus also had to maintain God's plan and purpose amid a world that just didn't get it.

Jesus was surrounded by people who would be happy to have him cure all their diseases and carry their burdens. But he offered more, offers more. Jesus invites us to embrace our limitations and turn them to God's glory.

In today's New Testament lesson, Jesus cures Simon's mother-in-law and then they bring him all who are sick or possessed with demons. And Mark tells us that “he cured many ... and cast out many demons....”

And yet, Jesus didn't cure everyone; he cured many, and many others were not cured. Don't you think Jesus wanted to cure everyone and cast out all demons? Of course he did. Obviously, that is not what he came to do, to be some kind of miracle man. No, Jesus is focused on more than that.

Notice how Jesus maintains his focus in curing Simon's mother-in-law. He simply takes her by the hand and lifts her up. Jesus is not interested in being a miracle-worker showman with magical incantations to cure all our ailments. He's not a traveling physician selling potions and elixirs.

Jesus is the manifestation of God's healing power – God's power to overcome that which troubles us, things like physical ailments, financial worries, emotional and psychological struggles, even spiritual AND physical death.

Jesus can't help but heal those of faith when he encounters them. He can't help but cast out evil spirits. It's who he is. But it's not the primary reason he came to us.

Jesus came to proclaim the Kingdom of God – through word and deed. It just so happens that healing the sick and helping us overcome life's struggles is a great way to do that, to show people what heaven on earth is like. But it's not the only way.

So, yes, he cured many who were sick and cast out many demons. And then he says to his disciples, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came to do."

Jesus is not going to let anything get in the way of his primary message, which is: turn to God, experience and share the good news that Jesus embodies, and bring others to faith in Christ.

Jesus stayed focused on that message, and so should we. Each of us has a calling, each of us has a place in the fulfillment of God's purpose, each of us has a role in bringing the Kingdom of God into greater focus. Don't let anything get in the way of that, and especially what you perceive as your limitations.

You may envision for yourself something greater than what you have – more energy, better health, more friends, a better job, more purpose in life. That's OK. We all want these things and we all have limitations.

For Jesus, living with the self-limitations of his earthly ministry meant focusing on God's plan and purpose, as fulfilled in his death and resurrection. For us, living with our limitation means turning to God for wisdom and understanding, and embracing it in faith for all the world to see. God will turn our limitations to his glory if we remain focused on being faithful followers of Christ.

Jesus could have fought the limitations of his earthly ministry, defeating his enemies and avoiding the cross, but that would have robbed the world of his resurrection power. For Jesus, it was never about him as a person; always about God and what God is doing in his life.

If we make our lives all about God and what God is doing, we too, can experience a healing and wholeness beyond comprehension, beyond our earthly confines, a healing and wholeness that comes from drawing close to God, come what may.

It's not about being perfect or having it all. It's about being faithful and having enough. When we stay focused on God's will, God takes our limitations and turn them to his purpose, his glory.

So ask yourself, is it better to be perfect in every way (whatever that means), or is it better to reflect the glory of God and proclaim the message of Christ, just as you are, just as God made you to be. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Loving God, scripture tells of your works of healing through your Son, Jesus Christ. We ask you to heal those known to us today who suffer from illness of any kind.

Soothe those whose bodies hurt, and calm those with fevered minds. Cast out the demons that lead to violence and abuse. Help us, Lord, to find a better way, a way forward that reflects your glory.

And most of all, Dear Lord, in our suffering and in our successes, let us proclaim your message of wholeness and salvation, that others would come to know Christ and follow Jesus.

We pray all this in your name, using the words that you taught us:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**