



## Broad Street Presbyterian Church

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### “Feeling OK”

Mark 1:29-39

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“Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.”

Hmm.

This woman, Simon’s mother-in-law, is healed of what sounds like a very serious illness and the first thing she does—the only things she does as far as we know—is serve Jesus and his four disciples. The one woman in the room serves the men.

Why doesn’t Simon tell his mother-in-law to take it easy while he makes sandwiches this time?<sup>1</sup>

Over the years, preachers have tried to explain away this turn of events. The woman’s quickness to serve is a reflection of just how quickly and completely she is healed. What a miracle—no recuperation period needed!

Or, yes, she served the men, but her service was a way of showing respect and gratitude to the one who healed her.

Or, in that culture, it would have been shameful for a woman not to offer hospitality to guests in her home.

I don’t ask for much. I just want her to have a moment, a moment to celebrate her healing and have a short conversation with Jesus. I want her to have a name. Of the thirty-four women mentioned in the Gospels, only fourteen are named. In the last week, I’ve been thinking a lot about this unnamed woman.

I want to share part of an essay written for *Time* magazine by a writer named Brigid Schulte. This is how it begins:

One evening when my kids were young, I was outside weeding my infernal gravel yard that, if left untended, begins to look like a furry Chia Pet. They were bouncing with sheer delight on the trampoline.

“Mommy, come jump with us!” they cried. “In a minute,” I kept saying. “Just let me finish weeding.” It was a time in my life when I used to routinely ask myself, “What do I need to do before I can feel O.K.?” And then I’d run through a never-ending mental list. That evening, with a familiar sense of vague panic rising, I felt compelled to finish at least one thing—the weeding—on that long, long list.

Lost in my churning thoughts, I didn’t notice the sun go down. Or hear my kids go inside. When I looked up again, the sky was dark, the yard still covered in weeds, and I was alone.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2344](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2344)

Schulte continues

... this is how it felt to live my life most days: scattered, fragmented and exhausting. I was always doing more than one thing at a time and felt I never did any one particularly well. I was always behind and always late, with one more thing and one more thing and one more thing to do before rushing out the door. Entire hours evaporated while I did stuff that “needed to get done.” But once I’d done it, I couldn’t tell you what it was I had done or why it seemed so important. I felt like the Red Queen of *Through the Looking-Glass* on speed, running as fast as I could—usually on the fumes of four or five hours of sleep—and getting nowhere. Like the dream I kept having about trying to run a race wearing ski boots.<sup>2</sup>

Does her story sound familiar? You don’t have to be in a working mother to have this experience. I know plenty of single men and women who are overwhelmed by all they feel they need to do. I know plenty of retired folks whose to-do-list is long and unrealistic. That’s why I love Schulte’s question:

“What do I need to do before I can feel OK?”

How do you answer that question?

Maybe you answer it: There is nothing I need to do to feel OK. I always feel OK because I know my self-worth rests in God’s love for me. If that is your answer, that’s awesome and please feel free to tune out for the next few minutes because this sermon is addressed to those of us who have a more complicated response to that question.

How we answer that question says a lot about how we live our days. If the list of what we need to do to feel OK is unending then we go through life feeling inadequate and exhausted.

Back to Simon’s mother-in-law. I wonder about her list. Maybe it was long and unrealistic. Or maybe it has only one thing on it: feed any guests who are in my home. Maybe that is the one thing she needs to do to feel OK. So, Jesus lets her do it.

If you have had a long illness or long recovery from a broken bone or new knee, you can relate. It can feel so good to get back to the routine, a routine that you didn’t like all that much when your body was working just fine but you missed terribly when you were laid up.

Getting back into the routine gives Simon’s mother-in-law a sense of purpose and identity and these are good things.

I think that’s why Jesus doesn’t intervene. Why he doesn’t stop her as she feeds him and the disciples. Because he senses or he knows that she needs to do this thing to feel like herself again. To be whole again.

And, he knows something else, something important. That serving others is a good thing. A holy thing. Maybe the most important thing. This is the same guy who in chapter nine of Mark’s Gospel says, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” (Mark 9:35)

We hosted two memorial services here at Broad Street the last full week of January. The loveliest thing about those days was the hospitality after the service. Our deacons provided food, drink, a place for sorrowing people to connect and rest and be replenished. The provision of these basic things—cookies, punch, coffee—it makes all of the difference in the world and I give thanks to God for those among us who feel called to such service. Serving others is a good and holy thing.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://time.com/48975/overwhelmed-time-management-ill-finish-the-dishes-when-im-dead/>

So, if serving others is on your list of what you need to do before feeling OK, you are in good company. The problem isn't so much what is on your list—it's how long the list can get. When the list gets too long and unrealistic, things fall apart

Back to Schulte's essay. To help her deal with her constant sense of being overwhelmed, she seeks out a productivity expert. The expert's approach to time management is simple: You can't manage time. Time never changes. There will always be 168 hours in a week. What you can manage are the activities you choose to do in that time. And what busy and overwhelmed people need to realize is that you will never be able to do everything you think you need to, want to or should do. The expert says:

When we die, the email inbox will still be full. The to-do list will still be there. But you won't. Eighty percent of the email that comes in is crap anyway, and it takes you the equivalent of 19-1/2 weeks a year just to sort through. Eighty percent of your to-do list is crap. Look, the stuff of life never ends. That is life. You will never clear your plate so you can finally allow yourself to get to the good stuff. So you have to decide. What do you want to accomplish in this life? What's important to you right now?<sup>3</sup>

That's the key, isn't it? When we answer the question: "what do I need to do feel OK?" the answer should include those things that are actually important to us—things that matter. It should just include more than things like weeding.

For help with all of this, let's look at Jesus.

What does Jesus need to do before he can feel OK? This morning's passage helps us answer that question. In these few verses we learn about how Jesus spends his days, how he allocates his 168 hours per week. During his week, Jesus...

- Spends time with the disciples, he spends time with the people who matter to him
- He heals people—helps them return to the fullness of their lives
- He shares good news—tells others about God's love for them
- He spends time alone—he attends to his own spirit—he reconnects with God

That's a pretty good list.

On my best days, my answer includes some of the things that I just mentioned. I would like to have more best days.

But, it's OK for the list of things we need to do to feel OK to include things that are a little mundane.

For example, I need to do the dishes before I go to bed in order to feel good about myself. I know that doing dishes is not deep and meaningful but it's a task I need to complete to feel OK about myself. A clean kitchen is the gift I give my future self and that's why it's on my list. Sometimes we are surprised at what's on our list.

About ten years ago I was visiting a parishioner in the hospital. He was young and on the mend and he had a group of his friends in the room and they were loud and talking and I didn't know any of them and I didn't want to get in the way of their visiting so I said hello and checked in with the patient and then got up to leave.

I made it to the door. I tried to walk through the door. I couldn't. I couldn't physically walk through the doorway. I couldn't leave the room without praying. I physically couldn't leave the room without offering to pray.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://time.com/48975/overwhelmed-time-management-ill-finish-the-dishes-when-im-dead/>

Praying is what I do—this is what ministers do. We visit people in the hospital and we connect what is going on in that space with God. That is all we do. It is a small thing; it is a big thing.

So I turned around and walked back into the room and said, “Excuse me.” It took a few seconds for them to stop talking. “Before I leave, is it OK if I pray?” The young man in the bed looked at me and smiled and said, “I would like that very much.” The friends nodded their heads. I gathered them around the bed, invited them to hold hands and I prayed. Then, I left.

I learned that day that when I visit someone in the hospital there is only one thing that I need to do before I feel OK and that is to offer to pray.

When you wake up tomorrow morning, Monday morning, ask yourself, “What do I need to do today before I can feel OK?” Keep the answer as short as you can. It’s OK to include things like weeding or washing the dishes or paying bills. Try to include at least one thing that is important, meaningful, that helps you get to the good stuff of life. For example:

- Spend undistracted time with the most important person in your life or
- Check in with a friend having a hard week or
- Give something away—time, money, energy—to an organization or cause that is trying to repair and heal the world or
- Replenish your spirit, remember that you belong to God

That’s tomorrow. For now, I suggest we have only one thing on our list.

Simon’s mother-in-law didn’t feel OK about herself until she had fed those that were gathered in her house. That’s true of us as well. Every week, at our early service, we feed those who are gathered.

In a few minutes we are going to feed everyone who is here. A little juice. A little bread. And when it’s over, I know for myself, I will feel OK.

I hope you do as well.

Amen.