

## Raise You Up

*Mark 1: 29-32*

<sup>29</sup> As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. <sup>30</sup> Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. <sup>31</sup> So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. <sup>32</sup> That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. <sup>33</sup> The whole town gathered at the door, <sup>34</sup> and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

I could tell it was going to be a hard day. I had just gotten back from traveling home for my Grandmother's funeral when I walked into my office and there sitting on my desk was a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup with a yellow sticky note on it. It said, "Thought this might help today. Praying for you. From, Jeanne P." Now, I'm not sure she knew it in the moment, but it was a tiny miracle in its own way. Nothing profound, just a little bit of a pick-me-up when I could really use it. Or maybe we say it was a little bit of God's grace in the form of a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup.

The truth is, we could all probably use a bit of a pick-me-up these days. I mean, in the midst of a pandemic there is a lot to manage and a lot we are all going through. Some of us, haven't been allowed or able to see loved ones in almost a year. Others, are on the front lines, risking their own health to care for the sick. While others, are stuck in the rut of isolation and grief during a long and cold winter. We could all probably use a little bit of elevation to our souls right now. Whether it be in the form of a "thinking of you" phone call, or a "I'm glad you are in my life" card, or even a candy bar.

Beloved child of mine  
So beautiful and true  
May your heartbeat come alive in everything you do

And I will sing this song, when you doubt you belong  
Yes, I will vow these words  
I will raise you up.

Jesus is just beginning his ministry tour when he goes to Peter's house for lunch. There's Peter's mother lying in bed and sick with a fever. Now what Jesus does next is a series of cultural "no no's" in Jesus' time. It was forbidden to touch an unrelated woman, but the text is sure to tell us he, "grabbed her by the hand." It was also taboo to touch someone who was sick or unclean, much less doing this on the Sabbath, and yet, still it says Jesus reached down and raised her up. Now there are some who focus on the part where the fever is gone and then Peter's mother gets

up and waits on them, as if Jesus just healed her because he needed someone to make him a sandwich. But that's not the point here. The point is Jesus defiles himself again and again to raise up this unnamed woman. The point is that this is what Jesus' life and ministry is all about: raising up the unnamed. Touching the unclean and returning us to ourselves. Jesus reaches down and pulls us up to a new reality. You see, the Greek word used to describe Jesus raising up this unnamed woman is the same word used for when Jesus is raised from the dead. It turns out, it's not Jesus' stomach that is hungry, it's his heart. Because this is who God is and this what God cares about.

In times of pain and death  
Dreams drowned out in despair  
There within the hopelessness, God's Spirit you'll find there

And He will hum this song...when you're not feeling strong.  
Yes, he will vow these words... I will raise you up.

Perhaps this makes us think about our own ministries and what we do in our ordinary everyday lives and what the gospel is about at its core. Or maybe it's a reminder about why we are doing what we do as a church. For the last few months, me and some colleagues have been doing a podcast called *Words of Truth*. It's a collection of interviews from people who have stories to tell about a day in the life of ministry in Winston Salem. Anyways, we interviewed a man named Bill McClain who has dedicated his entire life to working toward equity in East Winston schools. We asked him what churches like ours could do to help. He said that we start by going to the schools and exploring their neighborhoods, and learning what a day in the life of these children looks like. As he spoke, I thought about how many of our churches avoid these areas in the world, even though they are the places Jesus always went to. The gospel shows us a day in the life of Jesus—and it might make us examine something about our own lives and remind us of why we are doing what we do.

The days they'll pass us by  
Time fades before our eyes  
With faithful love we'll walk with you both in bright and stormy skies  
And we will sing this song...when you feel like you're alone. Yes, we will vow these words...

And notice what happens next. It says the “whole city was gathered around the door.” It's like Jesus is offering a vaccine in a Bojangles parking lot. People are flooding to him because when the good news is actually good, it elevates us and builds community and becomes a magnet for God's people. And to be clear: Jesus doesn't walk into town and say, “Hey everybody, I am here! Now, who needs a healing?” No, they are drawn to him because there is something electrifying and authentic about who he is and the good news he brings. And I mean, who doesn't need some of that these days?

So perhaps you can think of someone in your mind who needs some good news right now to lift their spirits. Good news that in times of isolation God Spirit says that we aren't alone, even when it feels that way. That when we are feeling hopeless and broken, there is no spot that is too

unclean for God's ready love. That in this reality, there is wholeness and justice and room for everyone.

So maybe in a moment, during our prayer space, we lift up their first names and if we are feeling brave, we let them know we prayed for them in church. Because this is who God is, and this is what God cares about. And may it be for them a tiny miracle in their lives. Which can come in the form of a phone call, or a card in the mail, or yes, even a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup.

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