

John Sampson
"Your Spiritual Check-Up"
Text: Mark 1:29 - 39
Preached at KVCC
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Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer.

AMEN.

Today I'd like to invite you to schedule a spiritual check-up, if you haven't already.

It's the beginning of the year, and it's a great time to check-in with ourselves and see how are spirits are doing.

For many of us it's a no-brainer to schedule an annual physical, or a couple of visits to the dentist, and perhaps a trip to the eye doctor, or the gynecologist. I know when I go to any of these types of doctor appointments as I am checking out and paying my bill the receptionist schedules my next appointment for months in the future.

But what about our spiritual health?

Do we prioritize our inner life, our life in God, our life in spiritual community with one another, in the same way as we care for our physical being?

Have you scheduled your spiritual check-up for this year?

Now for some here this morning you may have no idea what I am even talking about. And I don't blame you. In our society today it's uncommon to think about our spiritual lives, never mind having a plan to take care of this part of ourselves.

When we talk about our spirits we can be talking about many different things, we can define spirit in many ways.

This morning when I refer to spirit I am thinking about that part of us that connects with God, and is in communication with the Divine. It is the part of each one of us that sees beyond our individuality and allows us to be in communion with each other, and with the earth, with the sky, with all of the Creation that surrounds us. It is also the part of us that works towards building new life, and repairing fragmentation wherever we find it.

Our spirits draw from our emotions, and our imaginations, our bodies, and our community. They are unseen, but they have such a profound impact on how we behave towards ourselves, towards each other, and towards the wider world.

If our spirits are out of whack, we can draw within and focus primarily on ourselves, and our needs. If we feel spiritual disequilibrium this can lead us to hurtful acts of violence with our words and our bodies. If we are spiritually out of alignment our lives can be seen to be a chore, instead of a blessing. If our spirits suffer we won't be able to serve a world that so desperately needs our vision and our help.

And I think our story today gives us a vision of what spiritual disease and spiritual health looks like.

Overall this story we heard about Jesus and his disciples and the work they are doing in Galilee gives us an image of the world defined by punishing need. Where last week Jesus exorcised one man, we now see a world where many, many people are possessed by spirits of brokenness and alienation. We see a world filled with disease. We see a world in which the needs of humanity are so raw and so close and so desperate.

This is the world Jesus and his disciples faced all those years ago, and this is a world we can still recognize from our lives today. Don't we also live lives of raw need, and if we don't can't we see the need surrounding us in this town, in this nation, and around the world?

As modern disciples we are called to respond to this need through acts of kindness and love and justice. But if our spirits are dull and oppressed can we be the people of change we are called to be? If we don't check in with our spirits, and if we don't have a regimen to make sure our spirits are healthy and vibrant, can we even hear Jesus's inviting us to make a difference?

Think of Simon's mother-in-law. There she is at her house suffering from a fever, laid up in bed, unable to help herself or those around her. We may not be suffering from a fever today. Our bodies might be in great shape. But perhaps we suffer from the feverish pace of our lives, lives filled to overflowing with its own desperate demands. If our minds and hearts, if our spirits, are suffering from the feverishness of modern life how can we meet the need of ourselves, our families, and our world? Like Simon's mother-in-law perhaps we are in no place to serve.

But our story gives us a clue to how we can bring balance back into our lives, and our spiritual health. You see after Jesus heals and teaches he goes off by himself and he prays in the dark of night. He makes a place to reconnect with God's presence and vision. He follows a spiritual discipline that brings him balance and opens and recharges him so he is available to serve. You see this when the disciples track him down in the early morning hours. Jesus is recharged and tells them that they will expand their ministry because that is why he came.

This simple story of Jesus, and the first steps of his ministry, shares something important with us, here, today. It tells us that we can't just do the work. We need to create time to heal our spirits so that we can meet ourselves, and the world, in openness and a spirit of mindful engagement.

So, how are your spirits today?

Do you have a spiritual practice that you follow to recharge yourself, and open yourself to the need that surrounds you? For some of us our discipline may be prayer, or walking in the stillness of the forests and mountains that surround us, or meditating in a community based in the traditions of another faith system, or coming here to church once a week for worship. Or maybe it is a combination of a little bit of all of these.

For some of us perhaps we haven't yet developed a spiritual discipline. If that describes you, I would encourage you to find a path to periodically engage your spirit and make sure it is healthy. If you need help doing this please reach out to me during the week and we can set up a time to discuss what might work for you. Or reach out to one another, because there is so much spiritual knowledge and experience in this room. We can help each other bring ourselves, our hearts and our spirits, into balance so that we can follow Jesus in the work he calls us all to undertake.

AMEN.