

Source of Strength

February 8 • 2009

Focus Scripture Mark 1:29–39

Additional Scriptures

Isaiah 40:21–31

Psalms 147:1–11, 20c

1 Corinthians 9:16–23

Holy One, who makes all things possible, lift us when we are weary. Be our strength, and fill us with hope as we seek to serve you and our neighbour this day. Amen.

Scripture witnesses to God's faithfulness. As we are grounded in this story, we find our source of strength for following Jesus' call to serve. The readings today affirm the importance of prayer in keeping our focus for ministry. Restored by God's transforming love, we are reshaped as messengers of good news.

Focus Scripture: Mark 1:29–39

Immediately is a favourite word in Mark's gospel and suits its pace. The accounts in the first chapter of Mark's gospel are a frenzy of activity: the preaching of John the Baptizer, Jesus' baptism, calling of disciples, teaching in the synagogue, and casting out an unclean spirit. Seeking rest at the home of Simon and Andrew, Jesus is called upon to heal Simon's mother-in-law. Crowds begin to press in around the house, demanding more words and deeds of power from Jesus.

In the midst of all of this and in the heart of our story for today, Jesus goes out to a deserted place to pray. It isn't much of a break from the action for Jesus. The disciples follow and right away they implore Jesus to get back on the road. In that brief time apart, Jesus found renewed energy in God, the source of his strength. Jesus accepts God's authority on his life and moves on with the disciples to preach and cast out demons throughout Galilee.

Such renewal is the gift Jesus offered to Simon's mother-in-law the previous night. Jesus reached out to this woman who was weak with fever, raised her up, and restored her to serve. Jesus is restored to continue preaching and healing. Simon's mother-in-law is restored to continue serving as host to those in her home. Common to both is a sense of ministering to and with others. The Greek word used for what the mother-in-law does, *diakoneo*, is often translated in English as "to serve" and also can be translated as "to minister." This is the same word used in Mark 1:13 to describe how the angels cared for Jesus in the wilderness. By using this word, Mark describes what Simon's mother-in-law does as something beyond mere hospitality. This woman provides what is necessary to sustain life, as does Jesus.

Isaiah calls God's people to remember that God – who created the universe and rules everything within it – is their source of strength. Some scholars place the writing of **Isaiah 40:21–31** in the sixth century BCE, when the people of Judah were living in exile following the Babylonian conquest. The temple and Jerusalem had been destroyed. It is easy to imagine the people's discouragement and weariness. The prophet reminds them of God's power to restore and liberate, and of God's desire to renew their strength.

The psalmist rejoices in God, who restores and renews. **Psalm 147:1–11, 20c** praises God who gathers those who are outcasts, heals the broken-hearted ones, and lifts up those who are downtrodden,

To Paul, freedom in Christ is the source of strength for those who seek to further the mission of God's realm. In **1 Corinthians 9:16–23**, Paul's rhetorical questions make the case for Paul's apostolic rights and claims, including the right to be supported by the community. At times, Paul needed the community to be his source of strength as he ministered.

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The texts for this day sing with confidence in God's faithfulness. Jesus drew from this source of strength as his authority for healing and teaching. With Jesus, we are invited to trust in the power of God, who promises: "I will raise you up on eagles' wings." In what ways does confidence in God's faithfulness give shape and purpose to your life as an individual disciple and as a church? How might you forge a stronger connection with this source of strength?

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