

- Saint John's Pulpit (February 7, Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany)
- "Reproductive Grace" Mark 1:29-39

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. **30** Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. **31** He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. **33** And the whole city was gathered around the door. **34** And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. **36** And Simon and his companions hunted for him. **37** When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." **38** He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." **39** And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Blind, Deaf and Old...

Brian is one of St. John's family. He retired last year and now is working on the next chapter in his life. Those who have attended in-person services, you might remember him who was sitting in the pew. Recently when I talked to him over the phone, he was excited to see one big change in his life. He adopted a dog from a rescue center! Some people might doubt why this should be a big change. I told him, "Wow, Brian, congratulations! You got a new family!"

After this, Brian shared this meaningful fact with me:

"Thank you, Pastor, now I am doing my best to understand my dog as best as I can. Because the dog is blind, deaf, and old. So, every day is so busy and exciting to interpret what she wants..."

Yes, Brian intentionally adopted a blind, deaf, and old dog. The conversation with him made me think about lots of things. Let me ask a simple question. Why do we want to adopt a dog? Most people find joy when dogs listen to their master and follow directions or orders from their master. We want them to understand me, instead of understanding dogs...

"Hey, Max, sit, sit! Oh, good boy!"

"(after throwing a ball) Hey, Max, go! Get the ball, come on!"

Possibly, we try to adopt good-looking and intelligent dogs. Or less traumatic dogs from a center... However, Brian was different. He chose what we mostly don't do.

Our calendar says it is the first Sunday of February. It is hard to believe that it is February. Furthermore, according to a church calendar, the next Sunday is Transfiguration Sunday, one stop before the Lenten season this year. If so, this Sunday would be the last one to think of Epiphany this year.

We know that Epiphany means to celebrate Jesus' presence as the Light in the world. Before moving on to the Lenten season, a question needs to be raised again. What does it mean to practice Jesus' Epiphany? It means to become a light to someone. Just as Brian adopted a dog with multiple issues and decided to become a light for the dog!

That Evening, at Sunset...

On Sabbath Day, after his preaching at a Synagogue, Jesus visited the house of Simon and Andrew. He met Simon's mother-in-law with a fever there. Jesus immediately healed her. Although this looks like a wonderful healing story but is not comfortable to read.

At the Synagogue where Jesus preached, there were people to keep this special day freely. On the other hand, one woman was lying on the bed with

a fever. Without such a special relationship between Simon and Jesus, could Simon's mother-in-law be on the list for Jesus' healing preferentially?

Jesus not only showed the Light through his message, he but also knew that there were people who need the Light practically. For those who cannot meet the Light physically, Jesus visited them and helped them see the Light through their healing. Let me read Mark 1:32-33 again:

³² That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³ And the whole city was gathered around the door. Mark 1:32-33 NRSV

After healing Simon's mother-in-law, in the evening, at sunset, there was a long line of people at the house of Simon and Andrew. It was like a long line to get Covid vaccines these days! Please read verses 32 and 33 carefully to find some words in common.

Evening, sunset, the sick, and the demon-possessed ones...

According to Jewish tradition, on Sabbath Day, people were required to keep this special day thoroughly without doing anything. So, bringing people (or moving) was permitted after the Sabbath. Jeremiah 17:24 helps us understand this restriction clearly.

²⁴ But if you listen to me, says the LORD, and bring in no burden by the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but keep the sabbath day holy and do no work on it, Jeremiah 17:24 NRSV

Here is a big irony. Those who need light were not allowed to move in the daytime. They could move at sunset. Even in the evening, Jesus our Light moved, worked, served, and healed! Jesus did his best to heal the people as many as he could. Thus, all people could experience a real Epiphany by Jesus Christ!

Healing brings another healing...

Let's go back to the first scene of healing Simon's mother-in-law. Do you know how was her healing ended in the story? Please look at verse 31 carefully:

31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. *Mark 1:31 NRSV*

She began to serve them! This story was not ended by narrating her recovery only. After her recovery, she began to serve people. Once we experience Jesus' healing, we need to be the ones who can heal others! This is what Jesus wants us to do now.

If we are satisfied with our recovery only and do nothing to serve others, how could we make the world better? When Jesus commissioned his twelve disciples, he specially asked them to do this which puts in Matthew 10:8.

8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. *Matthew 10:8 NIV*

Freely you have received; freely give... did Simon's mother-in-law know this lesson? Whether she knew it or not, the Bible says, she began to serve people. Yes, our healing story should be reproduced by our serving. This is the DNA of the Christian faith for the last 2,000 years and over.

Wrapping up the Epiphany this year...

In the introduction, Brian adopted a dog with multiple issues. The decision was not easy. That decision will cost a lot. However, he chose to be the light to his dog which cannot see, hear, and live a long life. At his home, his dog is experiencing this epiphany every day. How? By his sharing love!

As we are going to wrap up the Epiphany this year, what does it mean to substantiate Jesus' Epiphany in our life? Please remember that there are people who need Jesus' light. Please pray for those who feel like they are in the evening or at sunset. Let's try to find those who need someone's help because of their weakness just as Jesus did.

Please know that we once needed Jesus' healing before. Then, if you experience God's grace through healing now, let's relay that healing to our neighbors. Just by practicing these items in our daily life, we can keep the world in His Epiphany.