



Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA
Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick
The 5th Sunday After Epiphany, February 7, 2021
Sermon Title: "Lifted Up Into the Light"
Sermon Text: Mark 1:29-39

Growing up, I used to help my Mom when she worked at a shop that would generously be called an antique store. Sylvia's place had a fair amount of junk as well. I would be allowed once in a while to take one of those things no one really was looking for, if it caught my eye. So since about 1970, I have this small glass oil lamp. The kind you would find on a night stand perhaps. It was out of commission for however long since someone used it before it ended up at Sylvia's, and then for another 50 years in my hands. Still there, but not what it was supposed to be. While filling other oil lamps which I use, and longing for light in this season of cold and dark winter, that little lamp caught my eye. I decided to see if it could be restored. My hands fussed with the old wick that looked like it might be at the dry rot stage, but I was able to slowly lift it up. As the wick soaked up oil, the fabric plumped up. When lit, the spark weakly sputtered at first, but then the flame grew until that little lamp's light filled the shadows with a dancing flame, before it settled in to the very purpose for which it was made. If that lamp was a person, just imagine the joy it felt again- at last! Transformed by this small labor of love.

That little childhood lamp, no longer on the sidelines, was brought back into the light. In this season of our lives, we may find ourselves feeling in actual and metaphorical places that seem cold and dark, wondering when we can get back to something else, feeling sidelined or even cast off. Longing to be brought into the light. The first lesson from all our readings this day is that you are not forgotten and God's care will show up even when it seems we have waited long.

But what about the times in our life that feel like we are not only waiting we are struggling? For me, migraines came and went, each time feeling inexorable. My Nana used to call them "sick headaches." True enough. They came pretty often. At their worst, they rendered me hidden away upstairs, bundled up in the dark, trying to ward off the pain. I felt powerless to get ahead of it or change it. All I could do was wait and hope for it to pass. It would, of course, but in the meantime, time felt suspended, food tasted completely off, and I was drained. At the same time there was this weird jitteriness, because I am "supposed to be..."

I am supposed to be downstairs, I am supposed to be with Michael and the girls and the dog. I am supposed to be running errands and playing, going over homework. And..

I am supposed to be doing my very favorite thing- cooking for my beloveds. There's a reason my kitchen has a sticker that says, "love people, cook them tasty food."

When I would hear the clatter of plates and utensils downstairs, it reminded me- I am not who I am supposed to be. That's when I thought, what if this really doesn't get better any time soon? Have you ever felt was sick and tired of being sick and tired and on the sidelines? That expression, "it feels darkest before the dawn" felt very real. I would pray to be lifted out of it, to get back to my "normal life" and love my people. When I was, it felt like being brought back into the light. After 35 years, I don't suffer those headaches anymore, but I realize that just because we know who we say God will be, doesn't mean it isn't hard to hold onto in our shadow times.

Whatever yours may be, bring those places and feelings with you to the door of Simon and Andrew's house. Because Jesus has just showed up. Simon's mother in law is in the shadows of an illness. We don't know how long she was affected, but I imagine that what might have gone through her mind when company came, was who she supposed to be. Perhaps she has found hope in short supply. On this day, Jesus lifted her up out of those shadows. Imagine her illness transformed to wellness, her fears turned to joy. Her feelings of emptiness and weariness, transformed to fulfillment and renewed strength. The chasm of separation erased as she was restored. When she was lifted up, she began to serve anew, as she had before. Probably the first thing she did was to light her lamp. Imagine that growing flame, a flickering symbol of her own rejuvenation, of walking back into the light, to her "normal" life, where she could again love her people. Kindle in us the fire of your love, Lord.

As that light fills the room, we can see that love lit the way-as Simon and Andrew told Jesus, and as Jesus came to her. In love, she now rises to care for them. But the story doesn't stop there.

Just as light cannot be contained, neither could the power of Jesus' love. Suddenly the whole village is at the door. Not just at Simon and Andrew's door, at HER door.

Of course, Jesus and the disciples are the ones healing and casting out demons, but there SHE is too.

Her serving is fueling and supporting their work in strength and in love, because she knows what that strength and love have done for her. It's an

unsung thing, but it must have happened. Her vital, life giving, loving acts are how the flame of love burned in her for others.

The disciples will go on with Jesus to other people and other places, the ones told writ large in the gospel. But this woman is like that little lamp. She will continue on serving and sharing light where she is. Never underestimate that power of those loving acts to light the shadows.

And that's the second takeaway this day. Each of us, is given the power and the strength to shine the light of Christ, in love and service, wherever we find ourselves. Each in our own way bear a glimmer of Jesus' light. Never underestimate what that can mean for us and for others.

To keep these things before me, sometimes it helps me to see a physical sign of this, so I light a light, or a candle, or a tealight. It literally helps me walk back into the light from the shadows. It symbolizes that when we are sick or troubled or lonely, broken-hearted, wounded, or weary, we are met by a God who loves us and comes to us, even in a small light. And that we can then carry the light of that love into the shadows for others. In our seemingly ordinary everyday walk, even the smallest tasks, done for love of Christ, and in union with him, shine the light of love and hope that leads others back into the light. As we long for brighter tomorrows, may that light illuminate where God has already met us in light, and may Christ continually lift us up to live in that light, to make it our own, and to kindle its flame for others.