

“Enlightenment”

Mark 1:29-39

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

That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. 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.

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” 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.” And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Prayer. Lord, keep us on the Jesus track of serving others in Holy love that we might continue to grow in faith and our spirits be uplifted by joy. Amen.

In her reflection on Enlightenment, Joan Chittister wrote: Philosophers and theologians debate eternally what every human being, one way or another, comes to know without doubt: Life is a process of watching the material dimensions of the human condition slip away while the spirit grows stronger, greater, richer all the way to eternity. All the while our bodies wane, the spirit is waxing. It is the paradox of life. That's why no one is ever ready to die. The older we get the more we are just beginning to understand life and to really live it well. That process is called enlightenment (*Songs of the Heart*, p. 22).

After first learning about enlightenment, about the body waning and the spirit waxing, a young rabbi wanted to know more. So he said to the master: “You know, when I study and when I join others in great feasts, I feel a great sense of light and life. But the minute it's over it's all gone: everything dies in me.” The old rabbi replied: “It is just this feeling that happens when a person walks through the woods at night, when the breeze is cool and the scent in the air is delicious. If another joins the traveler with a lantern, they can walk safely and joyfully together. But if they come to a crossroads and the one with the lantern departs, then the first must grope her way alone unless she carries her light within her.” (*Tales of the Hasidim*)

. . . unless she carries her light with her. I like the ending of this wisdom tale because it affirms the belief that it is possible for people of faith to internalize the Eternal Guiding Light of Life. I also like it because it makes me think about the persons, who I have internalized as guiding lights for the waxing of my spirit, and to wonder about Buddhist Jack Kornfield words of wisdom: One doesn't take a journey into the Himalayas without a guide who knows the ancient paths.

. . . unless I carry my light within me. In John 8:12, Jesus said: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” In my journey of faith,

Jesus is my light within, which, I trust, will never go out. With the faithful in the church of Corinth, I am uplifted with them in whenever I meditate on the scripture from Corinthians 4:16-5:4. 'We do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'

Back in the day, the Bible tells us that a growing number of Jews in the area around Galilee began thinking that Jesus was the best guide to enlighten them about the Light and Life of God. Because of the authoritative way in which he healed and silenced evil spirits that afflicted people, faith flamed the desire in those touched by the compassionate hand of Jesus, to carry the light of Christ within. . . forever. But what I wonder is this: In Jesus' time there were many healers and exorcists. What was it in Jesus' authoritative way of healing that made him stand out from all the rest, so that they chose him? Was it the way in which he broke the religious law against healing on the Sabbath; or, how he violated the gender barrier of intimacy between men and women; or, how he touched quarantined, unclean persons? Or, was there more?

In the first chapter of his gospel, Mark takes a stab at that more, by telling the story about the healing of Simon's mother-in-law by Jesus. Hers was a healing like most others, save for the fact that after her fever left her, she was raised up with waxing spirit to serve others with Christ's love. For those who love the Lord, it's the same light that strengthens the heart and deepens the compassion of Christians today.

. . . unless she carries her light within. In her blog, 'A Mother's Heart,' Susan Silva (Executive Director and President of EB Hope) wrote: 'I am the mother of an addict, who had to come to the place where I understood that I was enabling, and with that news firmly stuck in my heart, I began the process of letting go of my prodigal and letting God do what He had to do. It is in that process I created my blog. Walking through this journey as the parent of an addict I needed an outlet for my thoughts, feelings and experiences. Although much of our journey as parents of addicts will look alike, we will each find our way down the road using different helps. For me, my faith in God and my walk with Him is what has carried me thus far. You will find Him in each of my blog posts. He has carried me, strengthened me, and has taught me endurance and given me Hope. He also placed in my heart a desire to help others. It is out of that desire came the beginnings of what is now EB Hope, Inc. In April of 2011 the "accidental activist" in me was born. The first breath of activism started with writing letters to the Department Heads in our town of East Bridgewater. In those letters, I shared our family's story, that it was not easy enduring the pain and stigma that addiction brings on a family, that I was willing to be a voice in our community to help break down the walls of stigma and shame. . . Police Chief John Cowan positively responded and E.B. Hope was born . . . I pray you find hope in your journey.'

In a matter of fact way, Mark wrote: 'Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.' The verb that Mark used for "she began to serve/wait on them" is *diekonei*. Sound familiar? It's where we get the church word, deacon. In his reflection on this part of the story, Lawrence Wood, Author of the book, "News to Me" wrote: It was Simon's mother-in-law who first responded as so many others would, profoundly moved by the great change in her life. She was the first deacon, in the sense of becoming a servant out of reciprocal love.' As members of church today, we are on her same journey, of internalizing Christ's light and life so that we can 'deacon' each other with servant love.