

*Good Morning! Let us pray... Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle within us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created And you shall renew the face of the earth. O God who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations, through Christ our Lord. May the words of my mouth & the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight...rock, redeemer & renewer of us all. Amen.*

## Epiphany 5 —“Revived and Renewed” Isaiah: 40:21-31; Mark 1: 29-39

Here we are weeks after celebrating Christmas and the Epiphany, the revealing of The Light who broke into the world for us. DID you know... that this past week we marked another special day of light...? February 2<sup>nd</sup>?

Yes, many know Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> as Groundhog Day... when the critter either does or doesn't see a shadow upon emerging from its burrow. In Germany, the critter is a badger.

There is more to the story, you know, and it is related to Light, even being known as a Festival (feast day) of Light. In pre-Christian times, this day marked the halfway point between the shortest day and the onset of Spring. Maybe you have noticed a bit more strength in the sun?

For Christians, February 2 is 40 days after December 25<sup>th</sup> and known as Candlemas. The tradition was on Feb 2nd Christians would bring their candles to the church for a blessing. This was of course, important in the days before having electricity in homes. And there's more... for Christians, these blessed candles serve as a symbol of Jesus Christ, who referred to Himself as the Light of the World. Also, while it is customary for Christians in some countries to remove their Christmas decorations on Twelfth Night (Epiphany Eve), those in other Christian countries historically remove them after Candlemas.<sup>1</sup> There are other interesting connections for February 2<sup>nd</sup>, but I hope you will remember this piece of good news: Jesus is the Light of the World!

Before Jesus came, people felt like they were 'in the dark', lost, lonely and afraid; as if on their own with no help to overcome the challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candlemas>

Then Jesus comes, bringing a message that God's kingdom has come near. Jesus (and his disciples) is ready to help and comfort them.<sup>2</sup> Jesus is The Guiding Light in the dark. Jesus is the light of the World.

Our scriptures today provide this hope... that In God, through Jesus and Holy Spirit, we are revived and renewed.

I asked you earlier to listen for questions... what did you hear?

How about these....

*Don't you know? Haven't you heard?*

*Wasn't it announced to you from the beginning?*

*Haven't you understood since the earth was founded?*

Or these...

*So to whom will you compare me, and who is my equal? says the holy one.*

*Look up at the sky and consider: Who created these?*

And then the prophet concludes with this word of promise & assurance:

**Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength;**

**they will fly up on wings like eagles;**

**they will run and not be tired;**

**they will walk and not be weary. (v31)**

Over this past year, I've felt a bit lost, lonely, & in the dark. I know I'm not alone. I'm certain, we're all a bit tired and weary of the ways of this world, injustices, the violence, the rhetoric, the chaos and confusion in political, social & economic matters.

It is into precisely this kind of context that Jesus has emerged. The last several weeks in Mark's gospel have shared the life & times of 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine into which Jesus walks, calls followers and begins teaching, preaching and casting out demons. In fact, last week, Donna discussed the significant difference in how Jesus spoke and other leaders of the synagogue taught.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://projectbritain.com/year/candlemas.html>

So, what do these scriptures hold for us today? What are the signs of being revived and renewed?

The prophet Isaiah helps us know that if we are lost & lonely... God will see us... God will call us by name... not one will be lost or left. In short, we should understand that God is with us. And, when we remember we are not alone, we are renewed in spirit, in energy, and in strength. So much so we can soar like the mighty eagle, with wings spread, catching loft in the wind.

There is much more direct evidence in the gospel text; evidence that each one is seen/noticed; each one is received... not turned away or excluded. Jesus sees, meet us right where we are, and willingly crosses boundaries to seek and save all, especially the lost, lonely, and left out.

*'Simon's mother-in-law was in bed, sick with a fever, and they told Jesus about her at once. <sup>31</sup> He went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her, and she served them' (v30-31).*

This is significant... the first woman to appear in this gospel is the second person to be healed. Notice that it is not her name, but the name of her male kinsmen that identifies her in the text. This was a common convention in those days. Second, Jesus goes to her... he is an outsider, yet he goes to her and touches her. This is against social custom of the day! Then the fever leaves her immediately...she is revived and renewed. We know this because the woman does a remarkable thing... she responds, not in retiring to a private space as per custom, but in serving. In fact, the Greek word that is used here for serving is the same as the word used in verse 13, where the angels served Jesus in the wilderness. In the Greek, *diakonos* means 'ministers to'. Peter's mother-in-law ministers to them. In using the same word to describe these actions, the woman is equated with the angels that served Jesus. Furthermore, her house becomes sacred space as the threshold of her home becomes the door to healing all in the city that are sick. This is a mark of fruitfulness, revival and renewal.

There is one more sign of revival and renewal to be given attention. What does Jesus do after this act of ministry? Early before sunrise he went where he could be alone in prayer. This becomes a consistent practice that

the disciples will witness in Jesus. Daily communion with God in prayer is a practice of revival and renewal that all followers of Jesus should give attention to and adopt as a consistent spiritual habit.

In this text, Jesus is ready for the next ministry action... moving on to teach and preach, to share the good news, bring the light of hope, and bring renewal through love, healing, and forgiveness. That is why Jesus came!

Yes, friends, there is a balm in Gilead... to heal, to revive, and renew. And when you know that you've been touched by the Lord's hand, there is healing and renewal that looks like joy, thankfulness, and peace.

Now is the time, friends, to be engaged with the good news, and believe and trust that, truly, God is with us and for us.

May we be renewed in our confidence that God is working through us to care for and bless God's world and people. May we see and proclaim that the kingdom of God is still at hand.

Following Jesus is letting the light and love of Jesus into your life, into your heart and shown through your hands and feet. It is a conscious choice to be different... to reflect the light and love of Jesus.

May the light of Christ shine upon us and shine forth from us so that we walk in the light of the Lord. AMEN.