

Epiphany 5 B 2012 Lifted Up

The cancer has returned to your side, a fast moving melanoma.
You thought that chapter of your life was long over; but it's back.
You start making statements like:
In life, there are no guarantees.
I guess I'll have to sell the house to pay the bills.
You start thinking that life as you know it is over.
You have several doctor appointments.
You take various tests.
Finally, the verdict is given:
The cancer is isolated and controllable.
We'll do a surgery next week, remove some skin, take out some lymph nodes.
You should be fine.
With that news, your outlook changes.
All of a sudden, you have a new confidence, a new strength.
You have a new hope.
You stop talking about selling things and start talking about enjoying life.
The wind is beneath your wings.
You have been set free.

You wake up with the crud. The gunk.
You don't feel right.
You are sick.
You don't know how you are going to sleep.
You don't know how you are going to eat.
You don't know how you are going to walk.
You don't know how you are going to do anything because all you see is how bad you feel. The crud.
But after a day or two, you don't feel as bad anymore.
Your strength gradually returns.
You start being able to do things again.
Your energy, your enthusiasm, your thankfulness for life resumes.
You have been set free.

Bishop Mark Hanson story

Everyone in this sanctuary has periods of discouragement on a regular basis.

Life does not unfold as you wish.

You have times of stress with your boss.

Sometimes your relationship with your spouse is filled with angry outbursts rather than sensitivity and caring.

Sometimes you get frustrated with your children, because they do not live the way you want them to live.

They are their own people, but you wish they could hear what they sound like, and they can't.

Sometimes a friend says words that bite and cut.

Sometimes your hobbies, the fun things you do in life, become work, tiresome.

Rather than renew your energy, they take energy from you.

Sometimes your personal finances are not where you want them to be.

Discouragement is common and normal.

But here's the thing.

Discouragement comes and discouragement goes, like all the feelings do.

By tomorrow, your feelings will be different.

Six months from now, you won't remember the issues that got you down this week.

Times of discouragement, which are very normal, are replaced by times of encouragement.

You start to see the bigger picture, the long-term view, and you become thankful once again.

I've lived with our Gospel story this week, which is really a combination of four very short stories.

I keep coming back to Simon's mother-in-law and the difference Jesus made for her.

What does the story say is her situation in life?

She is in bed with a fever.

What did Jesus do?

He came to her, took her by the hand, and lifted her up.

I love that last verb: lifted up.

That's what Jesus did, he lifted her up.

As Jesus lifted her up, her illness departed and she was able to return to a lifestyle of service.

I believe that's what Jesus does for people.
He lifts you up.
He heals you.
He gives you wholeness.
He restores your energy and thankfulness.
He renews your strength, your caring, your self-confidence.
He reminds you that you are a person who is loved and cherished by God.
And he sends you forth to serve.
This little snippet of a Gospel story summarizes the Christian Faith.
In the story of Simon's mother-in-law, we see who we are and what God does for us in Jesus.
He lifts you up.

That's part of how I understand Church.
The Church is not where you go to be put down.
Church is where you go to be lifted up.
Church is where you go for wholeness.
Church is where you go for confidence.
Church is where you go for the bigger picture of things that puts your everyday situations into perspective.
Church is where you go to hear God's intentions for you.
Church is where you go to be lifted up.

I believe this:
This lifting up work God often does through others.
You have been raised up, you continue to be raised up, you will be raised up in the future.
And God will use the community of people that surrounds you to make it happen.
I know it.
I know it from firsthand experience.
I have seen it in your life.
Who are the people who lift you up?
Who are the servants in Christ who give you wholeness and encouragement?
Who are the people through whom God's light shines through to you?
Who are the walking examples of grace for you?
They are part of how God is lifting you up.
And I give God the credit.

You are on a mission.

Since you have been lifted up by God time and time again, directly by God and indirectly through others, it is your job to be about lifting up other people.

It looks like helping, being kind, being hospitable.

It looks like words of faith and hope.

It looks like expressions of encouragement and affirmation.

Your mission is to lift up other people, just as you have been lifted up.

Behind all of this you can see the hand of God.

Simon Peter's mother-in-law was lifted up.

You have been lifted up.

We are all in the lifting up business.

That's what the kingdom of God is all about.