

A Happy Church **Mark 1:29-39**

Last week, Juhee and I took a spiritual renewal leave. We were supposed to stay away from work for our spiritual renewal. However, in reality, we worked remotely. I participated in the church council meeting on Tuesday evening and led an online prayer meeting for Christian unity on Thursday. Also, Zion Korean UMC had a spiritual revival meeting on Saturday and Sunday and the guest preacher arrived in Rhode Island on Friday. On Sunday night, my body was exhausted, though my soul was renewed through the spiritual revival meeting. During this spiritual renewal leave, I re-realized that I am a task-oriented person and hardly shut myself off from work.

Also, I have realized that this tendency influences my way of reading the scripture. I believe that everyone is familiar with today's scripture. What first caught your attention when you read or heard today's scripture? For me, it was what Jesus did. He healed Simon's mother-in-law, and many other people and cast out many demons. He prayed and took off to preach the gospel. What then would be the logical transposition of this biblical passage to a sermon? As disciples of Jesus Christ, we should do like Jesus. We should heal the sick through our words and deeds. We must cast out the demons of our time. We should pray and share the gospel with people around us. Amen? While there is truth in this task-oriented interpretation, this reading of the text misses something important. What are we missing here?

Joyful praise and happiness

The scripture begins with the story of Jesus healing Simon's mother-in-law who was in bed with a fever. We don't know the exact cause of her illness, but she suffered from a high fever. I believe most of you have had the flu or Covid-19 in the past. So, you must know the feeling of having a high fever. What is it like? It's not pleasant. When I had COVID-19, I had to endure a high fever for three days. A fever generally accompanies other symptoms such as chills, headache, body aches, fatigue, loss of appetite, and nausea. I didn't like it. If you have a high fever, what do you do? You can go to CVS and buy Tylenol or Advil to help reduce your fever and pain, but in Jesus' time, they didn't have the luxury of fever reducers. Imagine that you have to endure a high fever for three days without pain and fever reducer. How would you feel? Awful! That's what Simon's mother-in-law was going through.

When Jesus heard about her illness, "he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her." How would she have felt? As David Dorsey always said, "Fantastic!" I still remember that feeling when my body temperature returned to normal after three days of struggle with fever. I was so grateful for simply not having any pain and fever. I can relate to how grateful Simon's mother-in-law must have been as well as her family. There must have been joyful praise and laughter in the house. Jesus not only brought healing but also joy and happiness. This is what a task-oriented reading of this scripture often misses. Happy people around Jesus!

We don't know exactly who he or she was, but someone must have overheard the joyful laughter that filled Simon's house. People in the town knew Simon's mother-in-law was sick and now she was well because of Jesus. Someone must have spread the news to other people. So what happened? "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." Joy and laughter that once filled Simon's house now spread and filled the whole city. Those who were healed must have been happy and their families must have been joyful because of Jesus. Those who saw what was happening at the door of Simon's house must have been amazed and happy because they witnessed God's mighty work through Jesus. It was not written in the Bible, but we can hear the overwhelming joy and happiness that overflowed around Jesus. That's the gospel message we can hear and see today.

A Happy Church

During the Zion Revival Meeting, the guest preacher asked, "Are you happy because of Jesus?" There are many unhappy Christians. One of his church members, he told us, always comes to the early morning prayer meeting and cries out all the time while praying. So, he asked what she so desperately prayed about. She was

praying for her unbelieving husband. What a nice wife praying for the salvation of her husband. She asked the pastor to meet him, so he met her husband. The pastor told him how desperately his wife prayed for him, inviting him to come to the church. However, her husband replied that he didn't want to go to church because she didn't seem happy at all, even though she goes to church all the time and believes in Jesus. Yes. People know whether we are happy or not. When Simon's neighbors saw joy in his house, they wanted to know what was going on and came to his house. When they found out what had happened, they brought people to Jesus and gathered at the door of his house. Healing and salvation reached throughout the town. This is how the good news of Jesus Christ is spread throughout the world.

This is the good news we need to restore today if we have forgotten about it. As the disciples of Jesus Christ, the first thing we should do is to be happy no matter what because of Jesus. Be happy in Jesus and with Jesus! That's all we need. Let me ask you the same question. Are you happy because of Jesus? Are you really happy in Jesus? Yes, we are! What happened in Simon's house is still happening here at Asbury. Each week, we share our joys and concerns. A few weeks ago, Joan White shared her prayer concern about a possible blockage in her heart. So what did we do? We told God about her in our prayer. Do you know what happened? Her testing revealed no heart blockages! There is joy in this house of worship! A few weeks ago, Cindy Ford shared her joy that she is one year cancer free! Indeed, there is joy in this house of worship! Each week, we are excited to hear Penny Rowan's bowling scores, which are surely much above average. Surely, there is joyful laughter in this house of worship! Last week, we had a funeral service for Barbara Cavallaro's son, Marc Merlan. Many of our church members came to support her and share her grief. By doing so, we witnessed the love of Christ and the joy of eternal life that overcomes the power of death! Even in the midst of death, there is life and joy in this house of worship.

When there is joy and happiness, people know about it

Christian faith is not about doctrines. Our faith essentially begins from a deep religious experience of encountering Christ. It's not about countless obligations we have to keep to get into heaven. Rather, it is about joy and happiness that overflows from our heart because of Christ. When the church is declining, out of desperation, we tend to seek practical ways to draw people back to the church. However, what we first need is Jesus Christ and to be happy in Jesus. When people around us see the glow of happiness in us and in Asbury UMC, they may want to know what's going on in our church and gather in this house of worship.

Helping others is important. Serving those in need is meaningful. But first of all, be happy because of Jesus. Be happy in Jesus. Be happy with Jesus! The Good News is that Christ comes to us. Jesus didn't remain in one place, but traveled and went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons. The same Christ still comes to us. Christ is still with us. We can be happy because of Christ. All we need to do is be mindful of Christ who is with us right here, right now. Let us end the sermon with St. Patrick's prayer [ppt]

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ to the right of me, Christ to the left of me,

Christ in my lying, Christ in my sitting, Christ in my rising,

Christ in the heart of all who think of me,

Christ on the tongue of all who speak to me,

Christ in the eye of all who see me,

Christ in the ear of all who hear me.

Christ is with us always. Let us be one big happy family in Christ! Amen.