

## FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

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The more we talk about Epiphany as the manifestation of God's love and power and glory, and then make the case that this manifestation of the divine has been given to us to be his light in the world, we are pushed to ask the question about how that is to happen in me, and how does it get started, and what seems most important. There are beginning answers in the scriptures for today.

O Lord our God, send out thy glory, send out thy power, send out thy Spirit in me; Speak to our hearts and change our lives, manifest Thyself in us. Amen.

For many, many people today, all around the world, there is a lot of prayer going around – I'm not sure if it's going up like our incense. But certainly going out, and around. I kinda wish that same fervor of praying for our Church team, and looking for God's signs, and staying with intensity until the final whistle was in our Body of Christ. But perhaps we can learn a few things for ourselves.

Of course, I'm talking about the world-wide event and phenomenon of the National Football League's Super Bowl. You can bet – well, yes, you can literally bet – people are looking for signs from God that their team is the divinely favored one in today's temple of Lombardi. I would not doubt if those who have actual devotions in prayer to the Lord have said, in the midst of their prayers, Lord, give us a sign. I can also hear Jesus responding, "Why do you only seek a sign? Oh, this perverse and foolish generation." But I don't think the ears will be open to hear that. Still, people will search their bibles, something, anything that tells them their team is the golden one of pigskin's Zion. I did hear just last week of a search done in the bible to seek out whether God has spoken prophetically in the written word. And speaking of betting, it is exactly this kind of thing that we all do, even buying lottery tickets as they pray for favor.

Anyway, I was told that the search for the revelation of each of the team's names was done, and the result was that in the bible, the Eagle and Eagles were in fact mentioned, and in very favorable terms, with connection to life, and new life, and protection, and fortitude, and strength, and relationship with God. Whereas the bible does not mention Patriots at all. In fact, as I

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understand it, the results of the search showed the number of times each was mentioned, that being the Eagles, 33, and the Patriots, Zero.

In any case, here we are continuing in Epiphany, and the question arises and I believe has answers for us from the scripture, regarding our role in manifesting God's light to the world. There is the essential nature of Prayer, as we have talked about more extensively in Advent, but also there is the question of how that prayer is informed, as well as the need to pay attention to the demands of both prayer and fellowship. And fellowship is in fact one of those areas where God's light must shine. How does prayer interact with fellowship is one place where our football example can help.

Prayer, as we have talked about in practice and theology, is about our relationship with God, as the old Order of Holy Cross children's catechism began, "What is our purpose?" "Our purpose is to be friends with God." "And how shall we be friends with God?" "We become friends with God by talking with him." The next extension is that by being friends with God, and maintaining that relationship through prayer, God is better able to work through us with his glory, his power, and his Spirit. He will make use of us for the building up of his kingdom. He will use us to show his power to the world.

By choosing to talk with God and I believe making that a regular discipline we show these things about us, which are super helpful in building up our own confidence in that relationship for even more:

First, it shows that we know Jesus is the right one to ask.

Second, It shows that we trust Jesus.

It also shows that we care about the problems that Jesus cares about.

And it shows that our hope is in Jesus.

Fifth, it shows that our lives revolve around Jesus.

And lastly, it shows that we belong to Jesus.

No one is kept from asking, and Jesus is not one to ask 40 questions to make sure he feels good about answering. That is seen in Jesus healing Simon Peter's mother-in-law without any ulterior motive, such as getting her on her feet to serve him and the boys.

It is also a sign of God's spoken word throughout scripture that we are not alone. If we do not pray, which is the word for asking, we will ask why we are not getting help from God. Why should we go through the traumas and crises of life alone? In the Psalms, God gives us examples of his people taking personal fears and concerns to him. When we lay out our problems before

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God, we know we have been listened to, and we know we are in the hands of someone who will do for us what is right and good.

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” ([Psalm 23:4](#)).

But here is a second consideration for today. If God has a desire to work through me toward others, proclaiming his kingdom, showing his power, and his spirit, what is it we don't understand about the nature of others towards us? This is a key feature of the need for fellowship. We are called in scripture to ask for help, not only to God directly, but through the fellowship of all the faithful. Let me say this again, God wants to work through you, and prayer from and through you is a powerful mode of this will for the world. Since that is the case, you, here, today, are surrounded by other people who have the same capacity of God working through them. And through them to you. If you will only ask.

It is one of the peeves of the ordained ministry that parishioners will go into the hospital and never let anyone know they did. If the clergy do not know, they can hardly be present to you with sacramental ministry. But clergy are not the only ones who God is working through. Through us all.

Even though walk through the darkest valley, don't do it alone. Ask God; ask your fellow parishioners, as well as your parish elders.

Look at it this way. The disciples brought the mother-in-law to Jesus' attention. It doesn't say whether he knew already – he most likely was not simply ignoring her. But they knew enough already in following him to ask him to help her, on her behalf. I have no doubt that some who came to Jesus after the Sabbath day was over who were not sick were there on behalf of those who needed healing.

That is one half of the fellowship manifestation - interceding with God for others. Absolutely critical in my experience. But there is another aspect I've hinted at, and that is to make your own needs known to your fellow parishioners and ask them for their prayers. And then one more aspect just to pass to you this important message, when you pray for others, whether in need of healing, or simply because some are on the vestry in leadership, or just lifting up people in prayer not knowing any particular reason, you are an agent of – you are manifesting – God's power and strength in them.

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There will be a lot of adrenalin on the football field today. One of the issues being talked about is the smaller size, and the lesser talent of the Patriots Offensive Line – the guards, the tackles, the center. That adrenalin is going to give them a physical lift to do what they are supposed to do most of the time with Tom Brady – protect him. But not just protect him from getting hit – protect him in his job on the field where his talents really lie, and that is as he is searching for someone to pass the ball. If they let down, he will have to scramble because the pocket of safety around him will collapse. If they maintain their protection and of that pocket, he will do some serious damage to the Eagles defense. And points will go on the board.

This illustration shows how we too in our Christian faith and ministry are to not only ask the question of how me, but of how them. That is an essential part of fellowship. The more we pray for each other, the more we provide spiritually that pocket of protection or space for each other to do whatever it is God has called us each to do. It is most effective when we are in smaller groups, and we have the opportunity to be more specific in our ministries, and in our affirmations of each other. And then we will find ourselves asking each other not just “how are you today?” , hoping upon hope the person being asked will simply say, “Just fine, thank you.”, but with a greater desire to hear how things REALLY are and thus know how to serve each other better. Make that quarterback’s passing pocket stronger.

Finally, the third matter for mission found in the scripture lessons for today, has to do with knowing your limits when you are strong at it serving, fighting the fight for God. No matter how we serve, no matter how we engage in fellowship, no matter how strong our working daily relationship with God will be, we find in the scripture the reality of taking time for refreshment or recuperation or retreat, both alone with God, and with each other. There are in the scripture today several different examples of this, three of them in the gospel alone. And I commend them to you:

- After the Sabbath to go have lunch together after a strenuous time of ministry at synagogue;
- In the dark of night get away from everyone and go find that quiet, lonely place and spend time alone with the Lord, even if someone has to come and find you to bring you back.
- When the appropriate time has come (as in waiting until the Sabbath day was done to be in fulfillment of the Law to travel) go find the source of your healing. Some might go to the beach, or to a chiropractor; the people of Capernaum went to Simon’s house to find Jesus.

Since we are human, we are limited. We need refreshment, and building up. If Jesus had to do so, and did, then we should also see our need to do the same.

I pray an afternoon for you of fellowship, enjoyment in each other's presence with a common hope, and the ability to release your frustrations in healthy ways, no matter who ends up with the most points.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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