

Scriptures:

Isaiah 4:1-9

Psalm 27

Matthew 4:12-23

## **Stewards of Light**

It's easy to get depressed these days. Between mean-spirited win/lose politics, the dismissal of fact-based debate, public shootings, brutal treatment of migrants and asylum seekers, extreme weather events and destabilized foreign relations, the darkness around us seems to be deepening. Fear is its constant companion. What's a person of hope and integrity to do?

The darker things get, the more afraid one may become to speak out, to venture truth, to stand for justice or mercy. Yet it is exactly at this time that our light matters the most.

The questions might begin to arise for us (for me) however - how do we shine when all the evidence around us says to give up, dim your flame, give into the stress, anxiety, chaos, hopelessness? The world is doomed, we are doomed. What if the evidence seems to show that our light makes no difference? That's the question so many of us are facing these days or perhaps some of you have stopped asking the question and you have just given in, thrown in the towel said 'this is it' everything is hopeless. Lets be honest even here at times when I want to shine the light I receive critiques at the end of the service. People look at me as someone who wears rose coloured glasses and doesn't get the state of the world.

It's a possibility that some of you might feel that way today. I had people in my office saying those exact things this week. I might have drifted down that road myself for a moment or two (Okay lets be honest I did), but for me perhaps it is the way God hardwired me I can't stay there long. I can't exist in the gloom and doom, I have to head to the light, I have to try and shine the light even when everything around is fighting to snuff it out. And believe me there is a fight there is a desire to turn to hopelessness and despair, I see it in my personal life, my work life, and most days it appears to be winning on a global scale. I think that is why superhero movies are so popular these days. The battle between good and evil is in the forefront and we dream and hope that somehow the good will win but it seems like we need to have superpowers to make that happen.

So what do we do? Other than imagine we all have our own superpowers. That's quite popular too. I mean look at these popular t-shirts.

Seriously though. How do we increase the brightness in a time of widespread doom and gloom, without also increasing the darkness?

First of all I think we need to consider the nature of light. Light from the Sun warms the Earth, drives global weather patterns, and initiates the life-sustaining process of photosynthesis. On the grandest scale, light's interactions with matter have helped shape the structure of the universe. Indeed, light provides a window on the universe, from cosmological to atomic scales. The original meaning of the word "light" is "something" that makes it possible to see. Jesus and other

wisdom teachers tell us that light is the manifestation of love, wisdom and truth. The sciences tell us that light waves carry information, thus intelligence. Both biblical authors and modern-day ecologists tell us that light is the basis of all life. If we as Christians or followers of the way are to be stewards of the light then we are to be the carriers of this love, wisdom and truth; this life-giving energy. The question for us becomes what kind of action can we take to increase the light and diminish the darkness?

I found an article this week by an author who pondered just that and Here are some thoughts and actions that I wanted to share from that piece of work.

First of all you are created as beloved as beautiful, as unique as loved.

It is time to **befriend the love** that resides deep in your soul. It is critical today to know who you are. To know what you believe in, what you stand for. Deep down you know and so take comfort in your inner knowing. If you have lost that place find out what you need to do to go back to your inner truth and knowing and visit this place within often so that you do not lose your way in larger spheres of chaos.

As you become a frequent visitor to inner vaults of peace and wisdom, you will radiate soul-energy into the world. As you shine this light into the world, you replenish the world's depleted storehouses.

Secondly, we need to **speak truth and wisdom out loud**. Let it pierce the deceit and vagueness, within which evil thrives. Truth is a brightly glowing torch. It carries a very high spiritual vibration. When you speak, your words reverberate far beyond your knowing, offering hope, instilling strength. I feel like truth often gets frowned upon these days but I think it is because it can be used to harm. Take care, that you do not also increase the darkness by coupling your words with blame, judgment or contempt. That is what the larger world seems to be thriving on and unfortunately that can mean when we speak our truth others read into it with defensiveness. Speak truth and wisdom out loud with love. Don't go down the road of blame, or defensiveness because when we do we are likely going to shade the light and close people and yourself off rather than open things up. Jesus reminds us to judge not lest we ourselves be judged. What does he mean? The simple meaning is that others may counter your truth and your judgment with their own. At a more subtle level, the energies of you speak not only penetrate those around you, but they ripple back into your own life. Take care the energies with which you speak.

Third, **lift up the values and ethics over politics**. Political expediency is about getting and maintaining power over others at all costs. It's about winners and losers. In the game of politics, the ends justify the means. Not so with ethics. Here the means matter greatly for it is in the wise use of power that social capital is accrued. How people are treated, how the earth is stewarded, how the vulnerable are shielded from harm matters every bit as much as any final result.

One pastor friend was lamenting the win/lose nature of the impeachment proceedings, and the hard divides it reveals. It can be the same in our churches, as Christians when we stop focussing on our mission and our light. We are saying the same thing as the Senate and the Congress. 'If your facts and perspective don't agree with mine, then I can simply dismiss you.' How can we ever be united like this?" I think for many in the congregation this dismissal, this shutting down

of others is not the way but if we lose sight of our purpose it can become toxic for anyone. As soon as we focus on politics rather than ethics, or politics over mission we lose our way. Ethics, life, light and love are grounded in the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, anchored in the life of the Spirit. They are the unmistakable good that the heart knows, and the Gospel bears witness to.

The HeartMath institute is a scientific research organization that studies the connection between the emotional and physical properties of the heart. They found that radiating emotions like compassion, care, forgiveness and gratitude have a positive impact on surrounding people. Beyond that, these particular emotions raise the electromagnetic vibration of the planet as a whole. This higher vibration, in turn, creates a growing reservoir of well-being which positively impacts the entire creation. The higher the vibration, the more the light it radiates. As we prepare our congregation's path for the future, each of us must be good stewards of the light we bear. Abide in the deep love, wisdom and truth of your soul. Communicate information and intelligence. Intentionally lift up ethical values that increase light and life. Do not give in to fear.

That is the message Isaiah brings to us in chapter 9. Isaiah dreams God's dream of a day of greatness and joy, when the yoke of oppression is broken. How poetic his words: "There will be no gloom (*mu'af*) for those who were in anguish (*muzak*)" — God's character as one who keeps promises and ultimately brings immense blessing to God's people and the world is eloquently declared here. No sunny optimism here, no *Try harder!* counsel here. God will bring God's good creation to its ultimate, promised purpose.

That is why I had to include the reading of the Psalm today. The Psalm, like Isaiah, fixates on the light. Because "the Lord is my light and my salvation," then "I will not fear" — an echo of Psalm 23. You can almost picture someone with good cause to fear repeating to himself, "I will not fear, I will not fear. I will not fear." Don't the words, when coupled to trust in the Lord as light and salvation, actually chase away some of the fear?

Mark Smith, in his book *Psalms: The Divine Journey*, demonstrates that this Psalm emerged from the Israelites' experience of worship in the temple. It was oriented toward the east; so as the sun rose over the Mt. of Olives, the blazing light would strike the eastern wall of the temple, creating a brilliant glow on the outside. But on the inside? High windows were designed to let that rising light in (after a night of watching and praying), the bright light would then glisten off the golden interior creating a nearly blinding display of radiance. Other nations worshipped sun gods. In Israel, the sun was a vivid illustration of God's bedazzling nature, and they knew as well as we that the sun is God's instrument of life, light and warmth. This light symbolized God's immanence and God's transcendence all at once! As Smith puts it, "In the temple experience, internal and external perceptions merged, and thus there was experienced the God of superhuman size and brilliant light giving joy and perhaps even healing to those who trust in his name." The Psalmist asks "to behold the beauty of the Lord." I don't think we think of beauty nearly enough, and simply to ponder the beauty of Jesus, the beauty of the story, the beauty of the

Church, the beauty of holy lives: Isn't this the antidote to fear? Isn't this how we find the light in the darkness? Recognizing the beauty that surrounds us?

In a previous life I would go to worship conferences. I used to lead worship at camps and at the university. I loved to go to some of the Pentecostal conferences because honestly I loved a lot of the music. The thing that happens in those places that we just might judge as emotion is something we sometimes can be missing. James Howell wrote "I spoke at a Pentecostal conference years ago. During the opening song (which took at least 20 minutes!), the guy next to me stopped singing the song, raised his hands toward the ceiling (or toward heaven?) and muttered, over and over and over, "Oh Jesus, you are so beautiful." - Howell wrote "I want to grow up to be like him. We sing "Fairest Lord Jesus... Beautiful Savior." Didn't Jesus say his body was the real temple? The ultimate dwelling of God on earth? Didn't Jesus have to be beautiful, or maybe magnetic or charismatic or beguiling, as total strangers dropped everything to traipse off after him, with no idea where they were heading?

The Psalmist probed deeply into his own soul and then reported on what he found there to God: "Your face, Lord, do I seek." Ancient Israelites had a profound sense of coming face to face with God in the temple. The disciples looked on Jesus' visible, tangible face, and saw the face of God. I think of the blind in Scripture being cured; the first thing they saw? The face of Jesus, who had just given them sight. Such a lovely emblem of Jesus' desire that we see, really see, perceive, in order to glimpse and know him face to face.

What if we strove to live in the light? I mean really live in it? I actually think it is the only way we will survive as individuals, as communities and as a congregation in these trying times. I have had a few people mention to me the article that recently came out in the Anglican journal that the church will close by 2040. As Joanna said to me yesterday "that's old news." We've been hearing such things for years. People have been predicting the end of the world for years too and we have overcome that more than a few times. I don't say that to be flippant and naive because that is how it may sound to some. I want to speak my truth. I believe completely that the church how it has been since 1925 and long before will no longer be in years to come but the church that follows Jesus, that looks to the light, that offers life abundant I see that being alive and well until the end of time. Why? Because focusing and living in the light offers life, it attracts life, it brings hope. If there is anything this doom and gloom world needs right now it is light. As followers of the Jesus way that is our work, our life to live.

Go now and offer light in a world that needs today and always.

Amen.