

December 7 2014

**Scripture Lessons ~**

*Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11*

*Mark 1:1-8*

**Sermon**     *Being God's Light in a Darkened World*

Recently I was reading a story in a magazine about a woman who lived in Martinsburg, West Virginia who was going through the living room turning off all the Christmas lights after a day with family; extinguishing all the candles before she went to bed. When she reached the door, she just happen to turn around and look back and expecting to find the room dark, she was surprised to see the room still illuminated by a tiny soft glow. She noticed that she had forgotten to turn off that tiny bulb in the nativity scene on the mantel and so she stood there admiring how one small bulb could light the entire room. Then she thought how that small light had always gone unnoticed because of all the other bright lights from the Christmas tree and all the other decorations in the room. That small incident became a kind of modern parable for her about how we are blinded often times by difficulties and by the distractions of life, often failing to notice that the guiding light of God in Jesus right in the midst of life. The woman realized that sometimes it is only in our darkest moments that we find Jesus. As with the light of that tiny nativity scene, Jesus in fact is always there. Jesus then is the light in our lives as followers of Jesus. It is this story that reflects the true meaning of Christmas. It is the radiance of Jesus life that guides us through our daily routine as well as our most difficult moments in all of life. It is the warmth of his life that renewed the spirit here within us allowing us to know that God is real and that God is present in the midst of life. It is the constant and steady glow of Jesus' life that offers us hope for the future knowing that God is with us, this day and every single day of our lives.

But if Jesus lights our path in this Advent season, we are all supposed to be light for others as well. We are to guide them to the Bethlehem stable, to the nativity scene in their own home and in so doing we can help others to discover that true meaning of Christmas amidst all the darkness; midst all the distractions of life. We can be a candle for others so that they may discover what we have hopefully learned for ourselves that God is the ever presence light that illumines our pathway; that God is the ever present light and love that embraces us day by day.

We know from our lesson from this morning that John Baptist came as a voice crying in the wilderness; prepare the way of our Lord. John the Baptist was the light for the people of Galilee leading them to the Jordan River and eventually into a new relationship with God. And we are in a sense to be the John the Baptist of this new day as well.

Some of you are old enough to remember the actor Robert Young of that TV movie (Father Knows Best) There once was an article that I found very inspiring. He was listening to his little girl saying her bedtime prayer one day and after her long list of requests, she surprised her father when she asked in a prayer “And now God, what can I do for you? Not a typical prayer Robert Young pondered the meaning of that question, I think, for his own , and according to this article asked himself, is there really anything that any of us can do for God. Young concluded that is nothing that we can do for God but we can make the decision to take on the tasks that God has laid before us no matter how difficult those tasks may seem. John the Baptist in our lesson this morning inspires us, I think, more than that he kicks us in the pants, to remember that to serve God in this way, is what he was talking about. During the advent season, in fact, the most notable is that we can serve others by lighting the way to the Bethlehem stable for them. To allow them to discover for themselves just how life changing the message of Jesus for our lives can be; to experience the wonderful transformational changes that God can make in our lives; sharing God’s love in Jesus is sharing Jesus’ message of forgiveness and eternal life, acceptance and love; humility and patience; faith and trust and peace all the fruit of the spirit from Galatians 5 that we have reflected in the banners that we hung up last Sunday.

Some people obviously will not be ready or able to hear this wonderful message of love in the midst of difficult and dark things that they have to face in this world. Like John the Baptist we must nevertheless persevere in sharing it through the things that we say and the things that we do which brings me to the difficult task for every one of us as we reflect on recent events. The recent events between police officers and African American in Missouri and New York City and other places around the country and determining; I tried to do it for myself and I invite you to do the same thing. What role do we play as people of faith in these events? What role do we play as followers of Jesus? And I thought to myself beside the obvious task of keeping the facts as clear as possible and laying the cards of our own bias and prejudices on the table, which all difficult enough, we are certainly going to want to put ourselves in the shoes of others involved in these situations to get a sense of what experience they know; what they feel in the present atmosphere of fear and mistrust that we all face but more than all of these things in keeping with this season as the season of light and seeking to follow the person that we call time and time again the Prince of Peace rather than bringing heat to

the situation; we will want to bring light to the situation working to bring parties together to create solutions rather than digging in our heels and being a part of what makes people fearful, polarized and distrustful. And our task will not be an easy one that we know. It will involve checking attitudes at the door sometimes; it will mean biting our tongues from time to time rather than shooting from the hip and letting the chips fall where they may. We may in fact not feel equal to the task bringing reconciliation to such situations. We may feel like there is no hope for reconciliation in the darkness of these events that we face.

In 1950 Ray Livingston and Jay Evans were asked to write some Christmas songs for Bob Hope for the movie called *The Lemon Drop Kid*. Evans and Livingston questioned that assignment because according to Evens, "We wrote the song very reluctantly because we believed all good Christmas songs had already been written and there was nothing left for us to do". But they overcame their hesitancy and overcame their fears of the task in a sense and wrote a song called, *Silver Bells*. They wrote a song called Silver Bells one of the most popular Christmas songs ever written. The point is the Christmas message continues to live. Each year the Christmas story is fresh. Each year the Christmas story is new. But you and I have to be willing to be those solitary candles that will light the nativity in the dark, dark places of this world for others around us.

I invite you then think of ways, think deeply, think sincerely in the coming week in which you demonstrate the love of God and the hope of God in Jesus for those who especially need that love and hope right now in the dark places of our world. As I mentioned with our children this morning, please, in course in view of these difficult events, don't put your light under a bushel instead let it light shine. And together we say AMEN