

"From Darkness to Light"

Healing Sunday
The Reverend Nancy R. Easton

8:30 a.m. Sunday, October 17, 2010
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Isaiah 35:5-8; Psalm 124; Luke 7:18-23

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.
Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light.
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.*

That's the first verse of a well-known hymn. I've sung that hymn at several funerals here at Trinity over the years. Its verses resonate with folks who grieve about someone who has died. But the hymn doesn't necessarily speak only to death and resurrection. It's ultimately a hymn about trust that God is leading us through all the things of life, and in the midst of all these things, is remaining with us.

That hymn came to mind as I watched, along with millions of people around the world, the rescue of the Chilean miners trapped underground for 69 days. One of the first things we were told, as preparations were made for their rescue, was that they would need to wear sunglasses when they came up to the surface. Now, there were other things necessary—clothing to ward off the chilly air, a high-calorie liquid diet to prevent motion sickness on the ascent, aspirin and compression socks to prevent blood clots, and oxygen masks. But the sunglasses were particularly important. The men became used to semi-darkness, and to come up into sunlight or even the bright lights from media and rescue equipment would be painful. (Think of the last time you had your eyes dilated, and how much you needed those ultra-fashionable sunglasses the optometrist provided...) And so, as we watched, each man ascended from 2000 feet below and emerged into the light in sunglasses.

Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light...

Those are the words I thought of as these men were raised to the surface and into the light. They had endured dark days—literally and figuratively, a darkness that was physical, spiritual, emotional. Theologians and non-theologians alike could not help but compare this to a sort-of resurrection. I am certain those miners who believed in God trusted God was with them through this time, leading them to the light, leading them home. Perhaps those who did not believe in God now do so. Such experiences move a person to that type of reflection.

In fact, many of our experiences in life may move us to the same type of reflection that these men must have had. We endure medical concerns and health issues where we feel we have little control. Financial worries, both little and large. Strained friendships and irretrievably broken relationships. Grief over a profound loss. Looking to the future not with hope but anxiety. If you and I dare to contemplate the dark days we have faced, or are currently facing...the situations in

which we live where we have felt, or are currently feeling trapped and entombed...it may well be that in those dark days you and I think about God. Oh, yet, there are times when we desperately need to be reminded of God's presence and overarching care, so we may trust him through all these things.

That's really what today is all about. Today there is opportunity for each of us to receive the sign of the cross of Christ in oil upon our forehead, and the laying on of hands in prayer to God for our healing. Maybe the term "healing" is confusing here. This anointing is not a made-for-TV moment of miracle-working like the "schtick" of some revival preacher. But if we consider the word "healing" in its widest-possible way, then this ritual becomes a profound symbol of the story to which you and I continually bear witness—that God is at work in our lives, raising us out of our own personal darkness to the light and life he offers in Jesus Christ. He is rescuing us. He is healing us.

But the truth is that in order to do that, God has had to **enter** our personal darkness. I keep thinking about that rescue capsule used to reach those 33 men, and how men on the surface actually went down in that capsule to help the rescue effort. Five men willingly descended to that dark depth, risking their lives, to assist the trapped men ascend to the surface again. Now think of Jesus Christ. Pastor Ludwig and I will make the sign of the cross on your forehead: The cross on which Jesus died is the darkness Jesus willingly entered, a descent into the depths he willingly took, to bring us out of it into light.

In our Gospel lesson, we hear mention of John the Baptist. He was the man who foretold Jesus' coming into the world and the in-breaking of God's kingdom. But John the Baptist was still trapped enough in his own darkness (the life of a prophet ain't all so sweet) to wonder if God was true to his word, to wonder if God could be trusted. So he sends messengers to ask Jesus if he is the One. And Jesus responds, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them." Every week, you and I are reminded of these same stories from the scripture witnesses who saw these things happen or who experienced them at the hand of Jesus himself. Every week you and I remind each other of Jesus' willingness to enter our darkness and his leading us to Easter light. Every week you and I remind each other about God's gifts to us: Forgiveness and strength, hope for the future and the amazing re-creation of our very persons as God's children. So this ancient ritual of anointing and laying on of hands is really nothing new. But it is a tangible, physical reminder of God's healing, transforming love, and thus we can experience it again. And the light of his love is very, very bright.

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Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light.
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.*

Thanks be to God. AMEN.

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