



“Are You Dying...To Be Born Out Of Darkness?”

Fourth Sunday In Lent

Sunday, March 22, 2020

The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Someone just recently said to me we are living in strange times; one might even say dark times. Now I have been a pastor for 21 years and I have seen a lot, I have experienced a lot. Some of those things have been good and some bad, like 9/11 when I was living in New York City, some just downright evil. But I realize that as I go through those things, I go through them not by my own strength, but instead by the strength of the Lord knowing that God is with me. And it always amazes me how the spirit works through the scripture that even through our lectionary readings, even as the pastors put together the theme dying to be born out of darkness. It is amazing how that theme seems so apropos today. Whenever we use terms like dark or darkness, it's always in the negative. We talk about darkness falling, or a dark sense of humor, but for those of you that like history you'll remember the dark ages, or a few hundred years later when the black death came in the 14th century where 30-60% of the population of Europe, perhaps upwards up to maybe 150 million people died. Dark times indeed.

We thank God that what we're going through now is not at that level, though God weeps for us when even when one person dies. These times sound vaguely familiar as we get on the internet or on the TV and we watch to see where the new cases are popping up, we're seeing if it is getting closer to our homes. We find ourselves hunkering down occasionally venturing out for basic necessities.

And if you have ever been in the dark and I mean really, really dark, you know what that feels like. It's a sense of isolation, you can only really feel yourself and you are sensitive to your heartbeat, to your breath, to your voice, and the noises that are around you. You get a sense that you are completely disconnected from others as all of the stimulation is gone. You can't see that big picture of other things around you and you are focused on the moment and on your own personal safety. That's what the darkness brings.

Does that sound familiar to you? Living in darkness separates us from what is familiar, from community, from friends, darkness stifles our existence.

In John's gospel there is a story about Jesus meeting and healing a man born blind. He lived his whole life in darkness and then Jesus “sees” him. The blind man had no choice in his life. This was his life. He was poor probably uneducated begging from neighbors and strangers alike, but it's his life, and he deals with it as best he can.

Many of the people at the time of Jesus, his disciples included, believed that a disability such as blindness was caused as punishment for sin. And so, his disciples asked him who sinned, was it the man or his parents? It's easy to blame someone, God, ourselves, our parents, or others, when illness or adversity happens to us.

But as Jesus makes clear, that's not always the case. Sometimes the hardship instead shows the glory of God, it shows God's works revealed through us and we rise above the adversity with God's help. Regardless of the reasons for the blindness man's or our suffering, Jesus has the power to help us deal with it.

Just before the story in the eighth chapter of John, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Those who follow Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life."

Seeing him and his situation Jesus decides to act, he tells him to make mud and he tell him to wash in a retaining pool near the temple, called Pool of *Siloam*, a Greek translation of the Hebrew name *Shiloah*, meaning "sent." A detail will be important later in our story. And the people are amazed! The man tells them it was Jesus. And so, he was taken to these Religious leaders, the Pharisees. Now these Religious leaders become fixated not just on "who" healed him but on "how" he was healed. Because Jesus healed him on the sabbath it was a big no no to work on the Sabbath and the Pharisees saw to the regulation of that. They begin to get angry at the man because he was sticking to his story that Jesus healed him, and that Jesus was "from God."

That just makes the Pharisees even more angry, bringing in his parents into the situation, even threatening them with excommunication by kicking them out of their synagogue community.

Then they turn on the man again. His accusers frantically trying to discredit what he knew to be undeniably true and what happens next fits with the *Siloam* reference. *Siloam*, meaning "sent."

And to give all the glory to God to share his message that Jesus called into. You know, our testimony, your testimony, my testimony, when the world is dark is incredibly important. Because your story is special. How God has interacted in your life matters. You are made in God's image and by grace you have been saved. Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again for you.

You can share hope, hope that removes fear and gives life. It can become a resource for others in love and service. And sharing helps you remember that God is at work in you.

Like the blind man our stories of God give God the glory.

God is at work even when we experience darkness, disease, and sin. We live in a fallen world where good behavior is not always rewarded, and bad behavior is not always punished. We live in an imperfect world.

We live in a world where people complain and sometimes object to the work of God that they cannot see that they are blind to. Sometimes even believers have a hard time believing.

We become scared of the dark and question our faith. But the darkness always gives way to light. Even the darkness of Good Friday gave way to the light of resurrection and new life on that first Easter day.

So, testify to that light. You are light. Be light to your neighbors so that they may see the glory of God at work in you.

Be light in your community, make phone calls, send texts, yell over to your neighbor.

Be light to our elected officials and health care workers. Pray for them, that God strengthens them through this trial and gives them the wisdom to make good decisions.

Be light to step into the darkness and unknown of our world and know the light will overcome it.

We are living through strange times. Be light, reflections of THE Light, Jesus Christ, so that all may see his love, mercy, forgiveness and grace. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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