

Stand Up and Let It Shine
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Deer Park United Methodist Church

Over these last few weeks, I've been hearing over and over again from so many people,

This just dragging despair.

Exhaustion.

A lot of people are feeling tired, and overwhelmed,

And I have to say that I'm feeling that way a little bit, too, myself.

Seems we've just been inundated and inundated with bad news from the media, lately.

Shootings---horrible shootings...

.. everywhere and anywhere it seems, these days.

I'm tense about being in public, lately!

And that's a bad way to feel as a preacher.

Hostage situations. Conspiracy theories.

People getting hit by commuter trains without anybody reaching down to help.

And so much more. I don't even want to mention it all,

because I don't want to spread the negative stuff we so often hear out there,

too deep in here, with us now, in this hour of worship.

Personally---in my away-from-the-pulpit opinion---

I think a lot of this feeling of being overwhelmed comes to all of us as a result of

The endless barrage of media presence we face

every minute of these days in our changing world.

Never before have we been so constantly hooked into the movement of information.

Before reporters can even get a full story, they're updating posts on CNN.com

--minute by minute as witnesses text in unreliable details from the scene.

We can be out getting our teeth cleaned while updating our facebook status,

Or clicking on an article here or there,

Or linking into a random video feed.

It's too much for the animal part of our natural minds to handle well,

I personally believe.

Overpowering. Overwhelming.

Now maybe it wouldn't be such a bad thing, if the media had different trends in focus.

But as the world and technology change, the patterns of information sharing does not.

Still, in all of this time, the media focuses so strongly on the negative over the positive.

So in this constant inundation, it's always coming as a flood the bad stuff...

---it's the dark stuff we're hit with over and over again.

And that fact, in combination with the media's

constant company in our lives and in our minds...

...makes for a real depressing world to live in, doesn't it?

And that fact itself, creates more and more problems between people,

As some *break* under all of that pressure.

---As some break, from being weighed down

by so much of that sad, awful information,

And only fall into the same darkness bearing so heavily over their heads.

...Contributing to the pile, to weigh down over others.

Making just one *more* terrible story for some witness to report on minute by minute,
and submit to CNN.com.

Tough situation.

...I won't go too far into that,

because those are more personal thoughts than pulpit thoughts.

But relating very closely to all of this, one thing we can share
more deeply between us in God's holy sanctuary...

... is this thought of the roles *we* play in the world.

Who we walk and breathe as, each day we wake up.

The ways we impact the greater soul around us, in each different person and thing...

... as our own bit of that beautiful life makes its way from here to there.

---Bound up in our own skin. Walking over our own legs.

...What *is* ours to talk about as we worship God together,

Is what each of our scriptures introduce to us today.

And that is this amazing, and warming, and necessary fact of the LIGHT.

The light that's inside of us, just as much as the dark---

(and maybe even more so)

---the light of God that's shared between each one of us,

Each day we wake up and breathe out.

From John 8:12-16:

12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." 13 Then the Pharisees said to him, "You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid." 14 Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. 15 You judge by human standards; I judge no one. 16 Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me.

And from Isaiah 61:1-6:

(Isaiah 61) The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; 2 to comfort all who mourn; 3 to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. 4 They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. ... You shall be called priests of the LORD, you shall be named ministers of our God...

In each of these we hear about this darkness that sometimes seems to smother the world,

And each of us living in it; just like I was mentioning before.

But it goes past all of that.

It doesn't just leave us with a sense of ruin and desolation,

But lifts us up higher...

...moving us out from that shadow and into the warmth of the sun.

(Pun intended)

Each of these scriptures pulls us together as a people of God's community.

A people of God's LIGHT.

To work with each other.

To bring that light and love and warmth of God past our own experience of it,
and into the darkness all around us...

... and if we're wondering, for practical purposes, where that darkness of the world is,
we know it's not hard to miss.

Just take a glance into your iphone, and it's right there in front of your eyes.

These scriptures each call us to be DOERS. BRINGERS of the light.

Testifying in the name of God through those kind of actions
that bring relief from all of the strain.

A smile to pained lips.

A warm flushing red back to pale cheeks.

A sense of care and friendship, in those lonely places, when people think no one's there.

...See, there's plenty of darknesses around for us to choose from,
where we can walk in, carrying the light of God inside of us,
out from our hearts, for other people to see.

As people who know God. Who have felt God in their own souls,
and who look to Christ for the way to be, here, in this confusing world...

... we carry that light of God with us always.

And just like our other gospel scriptures tell us,

it's not something to just keep for ourselves. To hide away under a basket.

But a light meant to glow out from within and into the dark,

And create a path of clarity for people to see their way through the dark places

before the sun rises on the new morning.

My grandma, who's 100th birthday I'll be heading up to next week,

is actually a good example of this.

In her many many years, she's always been a light in the darkness.

She's been blind since she was in her mid thirties, but she's always helped me see.

I was a pretty rough, rambunctious kid, growing up with two brothers,

And I sadly need to confess that sometimes that grit

brought me to bad places in the way I was with people.

She came to live with our family for some years, between us and our uncle,

And I remember so many times she'd take me aside when I was acting the fool.

When she did, it was never in a scary, reprimanding way.

She always did it softly. With kindness.

(something I guess grandma's have a luxury of doing when they discipline,)

But something she was particularly good at herself.

She had this way of turning your grimace into a smile,

Letting you know how to be better to people, rather than focusing on how bad you were.

Out of nowhere she used to play these Catholic audio tapes she had, for me

Talking about stories of God's miracles outside of the gospels.

And you'd think they wouldn't stick in a kid's head,

But they did for me. One of them, particularly,

I remember I played over and over again
Through the years after she gave it to me.
And she's like this with everybody---not just family.
Her neighbors, friends... friends of her friends.... strangers.
Being sure to always lift up.
Raising up all accomplishments high,
and also lifting people up after they've fallen and failed.
She's spent her life focusing on the good in people,
even when there's so much bad there, too,
And always nurturing that part worth saving. Watering that seed inside.
Helping the weeds in us wither away, while nourishing the good stuff—
--to grow.
We've jokingly called her the Catholic Saint of the family, in our own time...
... but man it's not far from the truth.
Random but constant kindness... given in the most unexpected, and loving of ways.
God's Light in the world.

The media—the world—might have its eyes buried and fixed wide on the dark stuff.
And God knows there are some people just hell-bent on bringing that darkness to
others...
...because that's what's consuming *them* inside.
---That's what's eating away too much at their *own* soul, and they want to get it out.
They want to see that darkness go to others, too,
because at least then they won't feel so alone in their misery.

But God knows there's also plenty of good.

...So much of the light inside of us that we want to let out with passion rather than inflicted pain.

Things inside of us that bring tears to our eyes to consider.

The good tears. The ones that come from that urge to put your arm out,
and wrap it tightly around a shattering back.

Helping to hold together someone who's falling apart.

...From the smile that spreads across our mouths after we see we made someone laugh.

...From that strangely immediate need we feel to jump forward and hold out our hand
when we see someone trip.

...From that warm feeling of wanting so desperately

to give back as much love as we receive,

after we've felt the amazing support of loved ones or friends,

Who somehow live with actual care and passion for who you are,

Who somehow, for whatever startling reason,

just want to have the feeling of being with you each day they live.

...And from that feeling of admiration and astonishment that overtakes us
at the breathtaking sight of a selfless ---even self-sacrificial---act.

Done by a person with a mind not set for their own well being,

But one that sees their own life in the life of the person next to them,

and gives up everything they have, so that other person can keep going...

...Keep breathing, Keep smiling.

...That's just a little of the light of the good we have inside.

And that's what we're meant to share as God's people.

As people who have felt that light and seen that light,

and can see more clearly through each step ahead

because of that light of God leading the way,

We live to share that sight with the searching eyes—the desperately seeking eyes

—of others.

Last week we mentioned that law of physics—that law of science which dictates motion.

That Newtonian thought that in the balance of the universe, for every action,

there is an equal but opposite reaction.

...Well, when we hear about these horrible things happening.

When we see these headlines scrolling under our fingertips,

talking about people doing horrible things to other people,

And we feel so powerless.

Remember, that we, as God's people,

have a beautiful ability inside of us that can never be taken away... only given away...

... And that is the ability to bring the good which counteracts all of that bad.

To bring love. To bring joy. To bring relief.

(Remember our reading from Isaiah!)

We *are* that equal but opposite reaction.

Just as strong. Just as powerful.

And though we might not look down into our phones at the dentist office,

and see a headline on CNN.com reading with an exclamation point, that

“Steve took some extra time out of his morning

to visit with his friend Joe and their talk helped move him away from his thoughts of suicide...”

Or that Sarah’s donation to the food pantry

saved twenty families from going hungry last week....

... or that your looking up from your magazine and sharing a kind word with a stranger

while standing in line, gave them hope that they weren’t so alone in the world after all...

...or that your teenage son’s efforts to get to know and befriend the quiet kid in class

who most don’t ever talk to, saved fifty people from certain tragedy

by averting a future crisis, and more talks about gun control...

....All of this stuff, each day works to bring a much needed balance to the world.

It works to shed God’s light in the darkness.

It’s the work of each of us in the Christian Community

to change the world just as fiercely and powerfully as the bringers of darkness.

To bring that light and help us see our way, as a whole,

into a future day, as people together.

This is our job --- our work--- as the Christian church.

To be God’s light, in those unspoken of moments.

To keep the world from tumbling over, in keeping that balance firm,

As souls made strong, and sure in the spirit of God to do God's work.

Today is our New Membership Sunday.

And each time each one of us—even if it's only one—

Come to the altar of God to openly share their lives in God's love,

And share that love with each of us...

... it's a beautiful blessing...just another glimpse

of God's light glimmering in the world.

So let's celebrate that moment together.

Let's remember that light inside of us and pull it out to shine.

We're needed, in the world.

As God's doers. As bearers of God's light, we live for that purpose.

So from the words of Isaiah...

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. 2 For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. 3 Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. 4 Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together ...5 Then you will see and be radiant; [and] your heart will thrill and rejoice!

Amen.