

Light Out of Darkness

2 Corinthians 4:3-6
February 11, 2024

First Presbyterian Church
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I was in the Church Office Tuesday when Emily Johnson and Jackie Pence came in with a sign, asking me if I could read it. The problem was, the sign was made out of pictures stacked one on top of the other.

I wasn't sure how to read it. Was it a series of pictograms where each picture symbolized a word in a sentence? No, that wasn't it.

What could be? I mean, Emily and Jackie could see it so clearly, whereas I had no clue. So, I asked a few questions. And lo and behold, I learned that each picture represented a letter in the alphabet. Bingo: I was able to read the sign. And the two other signs they had made.

These beautiful, very creative signs can be purchased today after worship in the Committee Room, along with some delicious goodies from the Chocolate Festival. Something to please the taste buds and the eye.

Sometimes things that seem obvious to one person are a real mystery to another – like the signs that had me lost and baffled at first.

That's exactly what the Apostle Paul is talking about in today's New Testament lesson. Writing to the budding Christians he planted in the City of Corinth, Paul says, "... Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing," to unbelievers.

Why does he say that? Well, he must be hearing that some people in Corinth just don't see it – they don't see that the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord is good news for them, that it changes the course of human history and can transform their lives for the better.

How sad, right? We all have people in our lives who just don't see it. Maybe they're struggling with illness or disease, the passing of a love one and the grief and sadness it brings, financial struggles or family troubles, the state of the world today! Faced by all this they're left wondering, wondering if anything good can come from it, wondering why do we have to go on, why do we have to suffer like that?!?

It's a good question. It's a hard question, a hard question to answer when someone is truly suffering and God is calling on you to encourage them, guide them, even instruct them.

How do we point someone to everlasting hope, to a faith that endures, to the abiding love of God, when insurmountable struggles have them just not seeing it, when they just can't believe there's any reason for hope, when they have no faith that things can and will get better, when they've lost touch with the love God has for us.

This was Paul's problem with the Corinthians. In addressing this problem, Paul does three things that can help us to help others, when it comes to hopelessness, despair and a sense of isolation or abandonment.

First Paul recognizes the problem. He says, "In (the case of those who just can't see it, it is) the god of this world (who) has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

When someone has lost touch with their faith – and even for those who've never embraced the promises of the Lord – there's always something standing in between them and the hope, faith, and love of God.

How do you break through those barriers, those things that we as people just can't see our way past?

We do that by remembering and proclaiming that there is hope in this world beyond any despair someone might be feeling, there is reason for faith beyond any pessimism that takes hold, and there is the power of God's love over and above any power on earth.

That's the second thing Paul does. Paul says, "... We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake."

What Paul is saying is look at all we've been through; look at all you've been through. How do you think we made it? By our own power? Because we are better than others?

No. If we do any good in this world it is because of the Lord Jesus. If we overcome any struggle in this world, it is because of the power of God. If we have any wisdom worth a darn, it is the Holy Spirit speaking through us.

Think about it. By worldly standards, Jesus would be considered weak and a failure. He was hated and abused by those in power. He was feared and ignored by the masses. Even his followers deserted him after one of his sermons, except for the 12 apostles. And in John 6:67, Jesus even asks them if they are going to leave him, as well.

He was also a political outcast, rejected by all levels of government; they wanted to kill him.

Even his closest friends spoke against him, and eventually abandoned him, and one of them betrayed him. He had no money or possessions. No house, no vehicle, no corporate headquarters, not even a Christian amusement park or theater.

And despite all this “failure,” Jesus Christ is the most powerful person to ever live, transforming millions of lives over thousands of years. And his power lives on today, through you and through me and all those who have received the Holy Spirit in their hearts. And that’s what you tell people you meet who are gripped by doubt, fear and loneliness.

But you don’t tell them like that. You tell them in your own words, using your knowledge and love of God to tell you what to say. You lift up your life and the lives of others as examples of the hope, faith and love of God. That’s the third thing Paul does, he points to how God shines light into the darkest moment in life.

As Paul says, “... It is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

If we are bold and gracious enough to reach out to someone in need, it is not us alone who does it, but God who brings us to that person.

If we have the energy to share something of ourselves with someone who’s really beaten down by life, it is not by our power that we do it but by the power of the Lord.

If we have anything helpful and inspiring to say in the midst of an otherwise hopeless situation, it is only through the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

And if we don’t know that and if we don’t proclaim it at every turn in life, then we are missing out when it comes to the power and truth of Jesus Christ. We’re blind to the blessings we have from God. And even worse, we’re actually putting up barriers that get in the way of the power and truth of the Holy Spirit.

So, when you are privileged to maybe be able to help another human being through a dark time in life, don’t miss that opportunity. Instead, move toward it and take that opportunity to point out the true source of our hope, faith, and love. Point to Jesus Christ as the one who turns despair into hope, resignation into faith, and loneliness into love. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Eternal God, we gather to sing praises to your name. Through good times and bad, through darkness and light, you are with us. Your faith in us is strong and true.

You have given us an inheritance of eternal life; yet we care more for the temporary things of this world. We are overburdened by our anxieties.

Have mercy upon us. Grant us the strength to overcome our fears and the courage to bear suffering without being defeated by it. We pray particularly for those struggling with health issues and other difficult life circumstances.

And for us, O God, we ask that you would nourish us with an ever-growing and maturing faith.

Give our lives an exciting sense of your presence, and may we worship you confidently and forcefully, in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray together, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.