

OVERCOMING DARKNESS

Dr. Fred Fourie ~Sunday, January 15, 2006



Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Isaiah 9:1-4

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time, he brought into contempt the land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time, he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-- on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their

oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

John 1: 1-9; In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him, not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

A friend of ours told me an after-Christmas story that makes a lot of sense. His grandchild wanted the "world" for Christmas, so he bought her a globe that could spin and would be an attractive addition to their room. Somehow, she was disappointed. "What is the matter?" he asked. "I thought this is what you wanted for Christmas." "Well, yes, but I was kind of hoping for a lighted world." She really wanted a globe with a light inside! "Well, I can fix that," he said. "Let me take it back and exchange it for a lighted one." Unfortunately, the store where he bought the globe did not sell lighted ones. So he got his money back and set out to find a lighted world rather than a darkened one. Finally, he located a globe with a light in it, bought it and presented it to a happy little girl. He told me, "You know what, I learned one thing. I learned that a lighted world costs much more." A lighted world does cost more. That is the truth about the nature of our faith. You always have to pay a price, sometimes frightening high, for shining light into darkness!

It cost Jesus more to let that light shine than we can ever imagine. He scared the Scribes and Pharisees of his time by shining light into their darkness. By revealing how depraved, false and dark their superstitions and prejudices were. He scared the political rulers of his time by talking about justice for the poor and love rather than hate, light rather than darkness. Jesus refused to look down upon the Samaritan woman at the well, ate with sinners and knelt down to lift up a woman of the streets. He was arrested, accused, condemned

and murdered! The cross on Calvary ended his earthly life, but it was not Jesus, it was the darkness that suffered defeat. The light kept shining. We re-enacted that miracle on Christmas Eve, by lighting one candle with the other. Almost in no time, this entire Sanctuary was transformed into a sea of lights. The world discovered that Jesus could not be killed. The Light had come to stay. Darkness would rule no more!

During the darkest days of the American Civil War, a delegation called at the White House with a sad report of the crises facing America. Lincoln comforted them with this story: "Years ago, a young friend and I saw a shower of meteors fall from the clear November sky. My friend was frightened, but I told him to look up in the sky, past the shooting stars to the fixed stars beyond shining serene in the firmament, and I said, "Let us not mind the meteors, but let us keep our eyes on the stars." Some lights shine as a fixed reminder of a permanent reality. The light that Jesus brought originates from beyond the stars. We believe that it shines from the heart of God!

America brought forth another son of its own, in the person of Martin Luther King. In his famous speech in the shadow of the Lincoln monument, he said, "We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force."

That "soul force" refers to the same light that also shines into the American struggle for true dignity and respect for all, irrespective the differences that keep people apart in our times.

"No person, no person is strong enough to carry the cross of Jesus and a prejudice at the same time."

No cross, no bullet can destroy true light, God's light that is still shining into darkness. If you are serious about letting Christ's light shine into today's world, it will cost you as well. Ask me, I know!

In the centuries during which the Bible was written, people knew the meaning of darkness. When they spoke of Christ as the light of the world, they were ascribing to him the ability to transform their world from one of darkness and despair to one of hope and joy. You must understand the darkness of that world to appreciate the words of the Psalmist: "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?" (27:1) or the words of John: "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."

Light has the power to bring that which was hidden into full view. We believe that God is made known to us in and through the person of Jesus of Nazareth. What is God like? We can do nothing else but believe that God is like Jesus. Loving, compassionate, merciful and forgiving. Jesus sheds light on the nature of God!

Our faith gives us a light to carry to a world still living in darkness. However, there is another kind of light. It is the searchlight of compassion and concern. The light moves out into the darkness to seek the lost! The light of the shepherd who leaves the ninety and nine and goes out on the hillside to find the one sheep that is lost. It is the light that a woman shines, looking for a precious coin. It is the light of a loving God who will not let us go!

In London during the eighteenth century, there were no streetlights. Everyone whose property fronted on a street or alley was required to hang out a light from six to eleven in the evening. Everyone was held responsible for the safety of his neighbors from the dangers of the night. A man with a lantern went about the streets crying, "Hang out your lights! Hang out your lights!" That is also Christ's call to us today.

Someone observed that in his basement some potatoes had begun to sprout, even though they were in the darkest corner of the room. He wondered how they had obtained enough light! Suddenly he saw it! There was a copper kettle hanging on a wall opposite a small window. Sunshine coming in through the window reflected just enough light over into

the dark corner where the potatoes lay, to allow them to sprout. That is my job as a Christian! I may not be a great light in the world, but at least I can reflect enough light from God that I can bring some cheer into the darkest corner.

"This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine...." says the beloved spiritual. I believe that true followers of Jesus will always strive to be lights, reflecting that love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness. "Go then, hang out the lamps." Shine into darkness! **AMEN**

