

Being the Church in Jesus Christ: The Wisdom of Pastor Paul

Brentwood Sermons for 2015

Being the Face of Jesus Christ in the World

Apr 19, 2015

**Ps 4 and 2 Corinthians 4:1-7 – Sermon Text = 2 Cor 4:5-6
(712, 727, 15, 639)**

Even when he's scratching lines onto a copper plate, Rembrandt is playing with the source and impact of light. Here is one of his most famous etchings, called 'Christ Preaching (La Petite Tombe).'



Three things have intrigued me this week
as I have looked at this image over and over again
and as we explored its impact on us at Bible study on Friday:
first, the primary source of the light;
second, the range of people attracted to this light; and
third, the varying responses to the light.

The primary source of the light, as I see it,
is from above Christ,
shining down on him and through him to the listeners.
There is a large open space in front on him,

filled with that light.
It's the space from which the light radiates through the crowd,
almost as if it hits the earth first, then reflects outward.
The light is shared with everyone equally.
And it is a light of blessing,
shining from the compassionate face of Christ
in the centre of the image.
It is the light of God's love.

The crowd attracted by this light of love is varied.
There are people from a wide range of backgrounds –
from children to old men,
from poor to rich,
men and women,
the educated and the street smart,
the Jew and the Gentile.
This is a light meant for the whole of society,
not just a select few who are devoted disciples.
All, in their own ways, at their own stages in life,
with their own hopes and fears,
are drawn to this light of love
shining from the face of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is not speaking at this moment caught in time.
He is giving what he has just said time to sink in.
And what an intriguing range of responses.
I get the sense that many are still trying to figure out
what he has just said really means.
There are a few who looked greatly comforted by what he has said.
Still others are basking in the light of the truth they have just heard.
They got it quickly, instinctively, deeply.
There's one guy off to the side who seems to be sleeping.
Probably thinks it's one more boring sermon
by another street preacher.
And there are a few, mostly the older rich male officials,
who are outraged by the threat that this light of love
poses to their privilege and power.

If we are to be, as Paul calls to the church to be,
the face of Jesus Christ in the world,
then we are well advised to take all three of these things seriously.
We are well advised to constantly remind ourselves
that the source of our impact in the world is the light of God's love.
It shines upon us in order to shine through us into the world.

In Paul's dramatic language, we are 'slaves' to that light
in serving the mission of God in the world.

This dramatic language serves to emphasize
one of Paul's key insights into our life in Christ –
the lordship of Jesus Christ over all that exists
and our loyalty to his person and cause.

Jesus came to save the world
by nourishing souls to flourish in his grace.

We live in Christ and his light when we serve that cause,
when Christ's love shines from our souls through our faces.

We are not perfect in our 'slaveness,'
in our loyalty to the Lord of all creation.

We are, as Paul says in one of my favourite verses in all Scripture,
"treasure in clay jars,"

"treasure in earthen vessels."

I like the way Eugene Peterson paraphrases this verse -

"We carry this precious Message around
in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives."

The goal in this Christian life,
the goal in the church's participation in God's mission,
is not perfection, but growth.

We are so wonderfully and mysteriously made
that we absorb and assimilate the meaning
of God's salvation in Jesus Christ
bit by bit, enlightenment by enlightenment.

The light of God's love is there for all of us right now.
Our acceptance, our adaptation and alignment,
take time, discipline, learning, and practice
that lasts the lifetime during which we see through a glass darkly.

This pilgrimage of discipleship will end, however,
by seeing God and his love face to face.

In the light of God's overwhelming compassion,
we will all be fully enslaved to that love.

And in that slavery, to God alone,
lies true and complete freedom.

Let's take another look at Rembrandt's etching.
Something else I saw this week was the calmness of Christ.
I rarely experience that kind of rest in that kind of resilience.

The light of God's grace shines on and through Jesus.
That gift energizes him to offer what God has given him to the crowd,
no matter who they are and how they are responding.

The only thing Jesus is enslaved to is God's love.

In that slavery, his service is to share that love
with everyone he meets and in every way he can.

He sows the seeds of salvation.

Some fall of rocky, dry ground and do not sprout right away.

Some fall on more fertile ground, but don't sprout right away.

Some on the fertile, moist ground, and begin to sprout immediately.

How the seeds take root and grow is the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is beyond our control, out of our hands.

Our loyalty calls us to sow the seeds by sharing the love,
by letting our little lights shine.

With that intention, you will find the rest and resilience
to be the face of Jesus Christ in the world.

I've included in our inserts today
that summary that we've used before
on practicing Christian resilience.

I'm not going to say anything more about it,
just leave it with you to review again
as the Spirit nourishes your growth in the faith.

On the reverse of that insert are the words
to a version of a great children's hymn that was sung last night
to close the Mahalia Jackson concert
with Dalannah Gail Bowen, Joani Bye,
Willie Sanders, and Simon Kendall.

It's 'This Little Light of Mine.'

For some reason, it didn't make it into our hymn book.

But let's stand up, if you are able, and sing it
to remind us and inspire us to go out into the world this morning
to be the light of God's love
that we have seen shining through the face of Jesus Christ.

*Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can
ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.
Amen (Eph 3:20-21)*

Generating the Resilience to Flourish in the Christian Faith

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, and significant sources of stress. It involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone. Here's 10 ways Christians practice resilient hope.

1. Make connections with people in ways that bless them

Establishing good relationships with others, to both help and be helped, strengthens resilience. The foundation of this ability, of course, is your relationship with God in Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Reconciled to God as child and friend, we are empowered to connect.

2. Don't view crises in life as insurmountable problems

You choose how to interpret and respond to the things that happen to you. You can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, see anything as an opportunity to grow in your faith.

3. Accept that change is a part of life

Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on the circumstances you can change. Find positive potential and pursue it.

4. Do something to move towards realistic goals, one step at a time

Ask yourself "What's the one thing I can do in this moment to move forwards in fulfilling my calling to be a blessing in Jesus Christ?"

5. Take actions that are decisive, consciously choosing to use your gifts

You always have the freedom to decide how to use your strengths and talents in the service of Christ's kingdom. Use that freedom to flourish faithfully.

6. Look for opportunities to grow in your appreciation of life in Jesus Christ

Enjoy the teachable spirit God has given you in Christ, exploring with the Spirit all the positive possibilities that exist in the midst of challenges and crises.

7. Nurture a positive view of yourself as a beloved friend of Jesus Christ

We were created in God's image, male and female, to be a blessing in God's name. Accept the dignity of that calling and live with confidence in your God-given abilities to overcome the barriers to flourishing in the faith.

8. Keep things in their proper perspective, trusting God's providential care

Even in the face of painful events and fearful feelings, remember God's providential care and don't blow problems out of proportion.

9. Maintain a hopeful outlook, again trusting that God is in charge

A hopeful attitude helps you provoke love and good deeds. (Hebrews 10:22-23) Try visualizing the good you want to accomplish rather than worrying about what you fear.

10. Take care of yourself, working with God in the whole process of growth

Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Nourish your body, mind, heart, and soul. God wants you to take care of your whole self so you are strong in being a blessing in situations that require resilience.

Based on the American Psychological Association's 10 ways to build resilience. Find out more at <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx>.

This Little Light of Mine

. This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

Monday gave me the gift of love,

Tuesday peace came from above,

Wednesday told me to have more faith,

Thursday gave me a little more grace,

Friday told me to watch and pray,

Saturday told me just what to say,

Sunday gave me the power divine,

Just to let my little light shine.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine