

“DRAWN TO THE LIGHT”

John 8:12 Matthew 5:13-16 October 8, 2016

For the texts today I have chosen select verses from John and Matthew. They speak to Jesus declaring himself the light of the world, and then telling us, as his followers, that we are the light of the world. We are drawn to Jesus as the light and he empowers us, thru him, to be the light of the world. In Matthew 5:16, Jesus commands us “...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

When I was traveling in England last month, there was one small stone church that had several candles burning at the back with the verse from John and it started my notes on this message at that point. I would jot down things that I wanted to share with you when I returned to America and Pine Bluffs, WY.

Our trip to England was Sept. 5th-Sept. 25th. Twenty days of traveling around Great Britain by rental car. My traveling companion was a good friend, Margene Stroup: she and her Garman were the navigators and I was the designated driver. We planned our trip to visit small villages, seeing the countryside along with specific sites, and staying out of the cities. As we planned our must-see spots the list got longer and of course, so did the trip, until we ended up with the 20 days. It would be a grand adventure!!

We saw many castles, cathedrals, small village churches, historic sites, and small villages with delightful bed & breakfast inns. We stayed overnight one night in an awesome castle, Amberly Castle, where our room had a private stone staircase up to the battlements where we could see forever. The interactions with the wonderful local folks we met were always highlights and we engaged in as many as we could draw into conversations. They were unfailingly warm, hospi-

able, and often, humorous. We were obviously from America as soon as we opened our mouths but that didn't dissuade them from sharing with us. As I was leaving the castle after the tour, I happened to see, right outside the gates, a craft show. I was intrigued and went in to see what I could find. I ended up buying a book from the author and listening to her stories of life as an author. I read the book over the next few days and I would like to share a poem from the book. The book is titled Along the Bronzing Lanes, poems through life, by Sandra MacGregor Hastie. The poem is "A method of forgiveness."

I went into a church.

It was the first time for a long time
and it was strange.

But they had said:

if you go into a church
and talk to God,
it will clear your head.

I sat down

And waited for something to happen,
But nothing but the flap
of my impatient glove
against my bending knee
bridged the gap
between the living
and the seeming dead.

It was cold and black
And misty as charcoal.
Nothing...

Eventually, impatient,
I said to God:
--Look, excuse me,
but I must talk to someone,
and you are the best person
I can think of.
Excuse me if You are busy,
with more important things...

- No, thinking it over again,
(in this tense, empty silence)
Why should You listen to me?
You have so many things to do.
You are more occupied, I imagine,
than the busiest of business men.
Why should you listen to me?

I waited.
There was no clear answer.

-All right, I said.

Look, forget about it.
I told them it would be
a waste of time.
I said, what could you possibly
have to say to me?

-You are the complete
and glorious opposite of me,
The example I can never follow,
The rock I can never climb,
the song I can never sing.

Here where the green gloom
Of an unknown, foreign
Church of God, settled between me
Now at the steps
And Him at the altar,
I felt the silence change.

There was a stir,
like the rebirth of an idea
in the air,
a noiseless shuffle of dust,
Restless. And I remember clearly
feeling uneasy

and as if unborn.

I listened, hard now.

God seemed to say:

-You talk a lot of nonsense

for one who has lived

quite long enough

to know better.

I see so many sinners

that you are nothing new

nor unusually shocking.

just another cause of sadness.

But I am God.

The significance of this

must truly penetrate

and remain with you,

if you are to see

eye to eye with Me.

I am God,

and I love,

and I forgive.

I knelt on the altar steps,

too moved to cry,
so close to Him.

Forgive me, Lord,
My doubt.”

One afternoon we had been on the motorway for two or three hours and still had aways to go. We decided to stop to get a very late lunch and just by chance (?) stopped at the Farmer’s Boy Inn which appeared to have a nice restaurant along with the requisite pub. They were famous, apparently, for their meat pies. We ordered lunch and while we were waiting, I struck up a conversation with an adjoining table. They had been chatting about different things and I couldn’t help but overhear. I explained that I didn’t purposely eavesdrop but went on to join their conversation. At some point I revealed that I was a Methodist pastor. I went back to my window seat. In a short amount of time, a young woman, dressed in black, came over to talk to me. Kim wanted to tell me that she and her family had just been to her mother’s funeral. Her mom had died unexpectedly, and they felt, unnecessarily. I listened to her story, commiserating with her situation. Then I asked her if I could pray with her. I held her hands and we had a prayer together. It was one of those times when I felt the Holy Spirit was speaking through me with words of comfort and caring. She and her family thanked me as they rose to go. I felt very blessed that the Lord uses me wherever I am.

Another example of listening happened when we were in Wales. We were trying to find the Brecon Beacons National Park so we could go hiking. The Garmin GPS system had taken us on a very roundabout route and at one point had us turn up a little lane that appeared to end at a farmhouse. But we went ahead and

turned. The lane turned around the farmhouse and changed into an even smaller road. I stopped the car then. The Welsh farmer was approaching the car from the fields. I explained that we were trying to find the way to the park. His response was that he was trying to find the way to heaven. I agreed and said that we were also trying to get to heaven but not right away. We'd like to wait awhile. He said we were actually on the right road and if we followed it we would arrive at the Brecon Beacons. I told him I would pray for him to find the way to heaven and then we agreed we would pray for each other. He was a genial, snowtopped old Welsh farmer and we had a meeting of the minds with an agreement to be in prayer for each other. Isn't that amazing?!?!?!

An unexpected aspect of our "grand adventure" was the driving in England. The country has grown considerably since I had driven there but the highways haven't. So the traffic is horrendous and the roundabouts very difficult to navigate. They are everywhere and if you miss your exit you will go miles/kilometers before you get back to that spot to try it again! By the end of the first week I was feeling very stressed out and depressed, knowing that there was no escape from the responsibility of driving for the next two weeks. I was in prayer that I would be able to regain some of the joy of the trip and not feel so down.

In the devotional Our Daily Bread, I read a meditation titled "Carried Through" by Monica Brands. The scripture was Psalm 30:1-12, "Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." It begins: I recently stumbled across some of my journals from college and couldn't resist taking time to reread them. Reading the entries, I realized I didn't feel about myself then the same as I do today. My struggles with loneliness and doubts about my faith felt overwhelming at the time, but looking back now I can clearly see that God has

carried me to a better place. Seeing how God gently brought me through those days reminded me that what feels overwhelming today will one day be part of a greater story of His healing love.

The devotional concludes with these words: If you are hurting today and need encouragement, recall those times in your past when God carried you through to a place of healing. Pray for trust that He will do so again. And the closing prayer was “Lord, when our struggles feel bigger than what we can handle, help us to find comfort and strength in how You’ve carried us before.”

Another devotion from The Upper Room was very helpful at that period when I was searching for comfort and strength from the Lord to carry me thru. It was titled “God’s Team” and was written by Don Kamps. It was based on the scripture James 1:12 that reads “Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.” It reads: My wife and I enjoy college sports. The traditions and strong loyalties appeal to us. In all honesty, when our team is winning, being a loyal fan is easy. Nevertheless, we have lived through the prosperous years and the lean years with our team, as any true fan does.

In the same manner, for people of faith, being hopeful during the perfect times in our lives is easy. During the times of difficulty, our faith can be tested. We might become negative and less hopeful when our lives don’t appear to be going our way.

Being in the middle of a financial or health crisis makes life look bleak. But God is with us to help us through the tough patches. God is the source of our strength to overcome and to win the final victory. God will never abandon us, so we need to continue to walk our life’s path with the Lord. Through faith

and prayer, we will overcome.

The closing prayer was: “Heavenly Father, give us strength that will see us through hard times. Remind us that you are with us and that with you, we cannot lose. Amen.”

Through prayer and devotions I did find His comfort and strength to persevere and make the best of the situation. I was able to be present in the moment as we traveled through England and Wales. I ended up driving almost 1500 miles in three weeks—on the opposite side of the road and through many, many roundabouts. As our friend, Mary Cushing, wisely observed when I returned with the nightmare driving stories, “But you did it!” With God’s help, I was able to persevere and by staying in prayer, I did make the best of it and we arrived back in the States safely with our itinerary accomplished and many stories to tell!! It definitely was that Grand Adventure we had dreamed about and we did it!!!

Jesus is the light of the world. He is the light who shines in the darkness and gives life to men. We cannot generate any light on our own or give life to anyone, ourselves included. But having received the light of Christ, now we reflect and radiate that light out to others. And that is our calling. Let’s not shy away from it. We have light that we have received that is powerful and life-giving. It is the light of the gospel. God intends for us to shine it out to the world and not keep it hidden under a basket.

Don’t hide your Christian life. Let it shine. Let the world know what gives you life. The saving gospel, the good news of Christ, isn’t just good for you. It’s good for everybody. All people in the world need what we have. Through individual one-on-one conversations—you talking with the people you know, your friends and family members—you have the opportunity to spread the light,

like a lamp shining in a room. And through the church's gospel ministry—through this congregation's preaching and teaching ministries, and through the church at large and around the world—we are helping to spread the light of Christ in a sin-darkened world. And the darkness has not overcome it.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you are the light of the world. That is who you are. Jesus makes it so. Embrace your identity as his disciples. God has created you to be salt and light. So go ahead and be who you are! Amen.