

Peace on Earth #2
Peace that Lights Up the Darkness
Luke 2:8-10, Isaiah 9:1-7, John 14:27
12/11/16

- It was a dark night during the winter of 1864. At Petersburg, Virginia, the Confederate army of Robert E. Lee faced the Union divisions of General Ulysses S. Grant. The war was three and a half years old and the glorious charge had long since given way to the muck and mud of trench warfare.
 - o Late one evening one of Lee's generals, Major General George Pickett, received word that his wife had given birth to a beautiful baby boy. Up and down the line the Southerners began building huge bonfires in celebration of the event. Seeing the lights the Northern camps got nervous and sent out a reconnaissance patrol to see what was going on. The scouts returned with the message that Pickett had had a son and these were celebratory fires.
 - o It so happened that Grant and Pickett had been contemporaries at West Point and knew one another well. To honor the occasion, Grant ordered that bonfires should be built. For miles on both sides of the lines fires burned. No shots fired. No yelling back and forth. No war. As long as the lights burnt there was peace, celebrating the birth of a child.
 - o Unfortunately it didn't last forever. Soon the fires burned out and once again the darkness of night and war took over.

- It was in the darkness of night that an angel appeared to the shepherds and a great light shone in the darkness with the announcement that a child was born. Peace had come and the message of this peace permeated the darkness.
 - o Let's read when this happened in **Luke 2:8-10**.
 - o The good news of Christmas is that in the midst of a great darkness there came a light, not just a temporary flicker or a bonfire, but an eternal flame that burns to this day. There may be times in life when we see the events of the world and the challenges in our own lives, we experience darkness but Christmas reminds us that whatever happens in life, the light still shines.

- The prophet Isaiah said this was going to happen long before it did. Let's read **Isaiah 9:1-7**.
 - o Now, if we would have read Isaiah chapter 8, we would have read when Isaiah prophesied about a time of darkness for Israel. A time conquer, invasion and despair was coming. The people would be oppressed and in anguish.
 - o But...trust in the Lord and do not give up because the Light is coming! Oppression will cease, slavery will be broken, war will be no more, the heavy burden you bear will be lifted, instead the land will be filled with rejoicing, freedom and light!
 - o The Prince of Peace is the Light in the darkness. Peace brings light and that light blasts through the darkness of slavery, sin, oppression, and injustice.

- So, then hundreds of years later, there were shepherds watching their sheep in the middle of the night. They were living in a land that had been conquered. They were people who were oppressed not only because they lived in the conquered land of Israel, but because they had one of most despised occupations.
 - o Shepherds were dirty and disrespected. They were not welcome in social circles. They lived as nomads, out on the hillsides with their sheep and that's exactly where they were supposed to stay.
 - o But, God had a plan to shine some light and break some oppression. Because that's how God works. The first ones to hear about the child prophesied to be born were the lowest of those in society – shepherds.

- I love how God works!! He deliberately breaks every ridiculous, oppressive social rule and he does it so thoroughly.
 - o Have you heard the story about how the Mall of America in Minnesota, the country's biggest mall, hired their first black Santa? If so, you have heard of some who have become a bit miffed because of this. There have even been calls to boycott the Mall of America. Because we all know that Santa is white, right? You can't mess with Santa's known ethnicity and race.
 - o A friend of mine posted a picture on Facebook this past week and I shared it on my timeline. Here it is...
 - o I believe with all my heart that God is very deliberate in what he does. There is nothing haphazard. I believe that he deliberately sent his Son to be a Middle Eastern Jew – one of the most oppressed people groups – to break every societal rule. He did it to shed some light! That light is that Jesus came for everyone!

- When, as we just read in Isaiah, the Messiah would come from Galilee, one of the most lowly and least respected regions of Israel where no one thought anything good could come from, he was shedding the light that the Messiah – peace – came for everyone! When he sent the angelic proclamation to a group of dirty, despised and oppressed shepherds, he was shedding the light that Jesus – peace - came for everyone!
 - o Yet, the shepherds had a choice. What will they do with this light of peace? How will they respond?
 - o Thousands of years later, we are posed with the same questions. When the light of peace shines, what will we do with it? How will we respond?

- First, we have to really see the light. Isaiah 9:2 says the people who walk in darkness have seen a great light. But, we have to choose to really see the light.
 - o Seeing the light is not always a pleasant thing. Light is not always well received by those who live in darkness. Have you ever been driving in the dark and had a car come up over a hill with its high beams on? After a long time in darkness it hurts to come back into light.
 - o John 3:19-21 also tells us this when it says, "And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light,

for their actions were evil. ²⁰ All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants."

- Sometimes we love darkness because our evil deeds, our sin can be better hidden in the dark. When the light of Jesus starts to shine, it's not pleasant in that it makes things visible that had before been hidden. When the light of Jesus begins to shine on us, it begins to reveal our sin, and those things we think we have hidden from everyone else, and the dark places in our hearts that we don't like to examine. And, this makes us very uncomfortable.
 - o We would much rather avoid being confronted with our downfalls, sin and the dark places in our hearts. We don't like to feel uncomfortable. When we do, we try to get away from it and tune it out.
 - o It's like when you're watching TV, sitting back enjoying one of your favorite shows or a good movie and you've got your snack there with you and a nice beverage. You're nice and comfortable reclining in the Lazy Boy or on the couch. Then, here comes a commercial for Save the Children or something that shows pictures of emaciated children, dirty drinking water, children walking around in the dump, surrounded by piles of garbage. And, it confronts you of the excess that you live in. You can either see it or you can change the channel and tune it out.
 - o We have that very same choice when it comes to seeing the light of peace.
- Even when we think we are clean, the light of peace will expose things that we didn't even realize were there. It's like when you clean your living room and think that it's clean only to have the sun shine in through the window and reveal all the dust that was left behind.
 - o Light will always expose the dirt. The closer we get to Jesus the more we will have to deal with "hidden sin" in our lives. Little things that we had never noticed before will become a big deal when exposed by the light. There might be some dust left behind in our lives.
 - o Are we willing to see it?
- If we are willing to see it, will we fear or rejoice for the light? Fear will cause us to seek the darkness again. Fear will cause us to seek comfort again.
 - o When the shepherds saw the angel in the sky and light of glory around the angel, they were afraid. What did this mean for them? What was going to happen? What was expected of them? Why them? What did God want with them?? They're initial reaction is fear.
- When the light of peace enables us to see, often our initial reaction is fear. We change the channel, we ignore the message, we stop going to church, we avoid the pastor, we turn our heads, we go back to life as usual trying to dim any glimmer of light left behind.
 - o Why do we fear? Because we know once we see something exposed by the light, we will have to do something about it. God doesn't just shine line to shine light. He shines light in order to bring something about.

- He shines light on in our sin in order to bring about our repentance. He shines light on our human depravity and sinful nature in order to bring about our dependence on him for salvation and for a new heart.
 - He shines light on oppression and injustice so that we will do something about it.
- So, we fear because we know that we can no longer pretend not to see. We can no longer pretend that we don't have to do anything about what the light exposes. We can no longer hide in the darkness, oblivious to the fact that there is light. There is fear in that because the light of peace will change your life completely.
- Yet, we don't have to fear. Just as the angel told the shepherds, "Don't be afraid for I bring you good news of great joy for all people!" Instead, we can rejoice! We can rejoice because light doesn't just bring exposure, it brings a solution!
 - The solution is Jesus! A child is born! A Son is given! He is the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Wonderful Counselor, the Prince of Peace! Through him, there is a solution for your sin. Through him, there is a solution for the dark, hidden places of your heart.
 - Through him, there is a solution for injustice. Through him, there is a solution for oppression. Through him, you can be set free from slavery to sin to be free in peace! Through him, all people can be set free in peace!
- And, through him, we can be givers of this light of peace. That is our final response to the light – that we reflect the light.
- The Shepherds, after they went to see the baby, they became the first evangelists to share the gospel of Jesus. Those who were oppressed, became free through Jesus and shared this freedom with others. They experienced the light and their only response could be to share the light and reflect the light that they had experienced.
 - The same light that pierced the skies over Bethlehem with the message of salvation is shining today. Those of us who have experienced that light have a job to do. Like the Shepherds who were told the glorious message of joy and hope, we need to take the Good News into dark places. Jesus has given to us the job of carrying His light into the shadows. We are to reflect the light of the Gospel into every dark corner of this earth.
- The message of peace is not a quiet word whispered in the darkness that cloaks the injustice and the slavery to sin around us. It is a proclamation and a life that we are to share and take to others.
- Rom 10:14 says, "But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?"
 - We are called to be light givers, to shine the light of Jesus to all the world.
- A young boy about nine years old went with his parents to Europe one summer and visited some great old cathedrals of the past. In each cathedral he saw the massive stained glass

portraits of the disciples and of other saints. Upon return, his Sunday School teacher asked what is a saint?" His mind went back to those massive beautiful stained glass windows, he said, "A saint is a man the light shines through."

- You and I are called to be saints that shine the light of peace through us.
 - Matt. 5:14-16 says, "You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."
- Just like the angels that shared the light with shepherds and the shepherds shared the light with everyone they saw, we must be compelled to share the light.
- Over the years, I've been asked the question as to why Christians feel like they must share Christianity with everyone? My first response is that it's not so much about sharing Christianity, as a religion, it's about sharing Jesus, as the most important relationship in my life. I can no more stop talking about Jesus than I can stop talking about my husband or my kids.
 - My second response is because Jesus has shed his light into my life and into my heart and I believe that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life and because I love people and desire everyone to know this life-changing relationship with the Light of Peace, Jesus, then I love them enough to tell them about him.
- Do you love Jesus enough to talk about him? Do you love people enough to share with them the way to the light of peace? Is his light so shining in you that you can't hide it? We dare not hide the light of the Gospel under a basket. We cannot keep God's good news and grace in a jar. It cannot be stored, it was not meant to be. It can only be used as it is given and lived out in the world which desperately needs it.
- Some folks are born, raised, and die in cultures that have never seen their first flashlight of hope. Imagine it! Church, listen carefully, there are people in our very community who don't know who Jesus is. There are children right now in this community who have no clue what Jesus did or who he is. I know them! My children are friends with them!
 - When the truth of that hits me, I find myself a little impatient with Christians who do nothing but shine lights for themselves. Too many Christians and churches are having what we might call flashlight parties where they just shine the light on each other. Lots of light! Too much light to be hoarded!
 - Jesus says to shine for the world. Shine your light into the darkness; that's where it is really needed. Spend less time in your own little well-lighted all Christian world and more time shining in the darkness!
- A visitor to an electric generating station asked the chief engineer, 'Where do you store the electricity?' 'We don't store it,' the engineer replied. 'We just make it.' When a light switch is flipped on in a city one hundred miles away, it places a demand on the system; it registers at the generating plant and prompts greater output."

- You can't store your light just for yourself, saying "it's personal." If you have a willing heart and desire to reflect the light of God, people will be drawn to it. They will see your light. And, as you care for them, you can share with them where your light comes from.
 - God can use each one of us to shine his love into a searching heart. All of us are surrounded by people walking in darkness. You can reflect the light of love that changes their lives forever.
- Let's shine the light by proclaiming the message the angels sang so many years ago. The light of the word is still shining today. The Prince of Peace stands ready to replace darkness with light. There cannot be peace on earth until we have peace within. We cannot have inner peace until we have peace with God.
- Isaiah 60:1-3 says "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."
 - Rejoice for the Light of Peace, Jesus, has come to heal the broken, free the slave, break oppression. And, in his name, we must do the same. We can't pretend any longer not to see the light. We cannot fear the light. Instead, we must see it, rejoice in it and reflect it so others might experience Jesus, the Light, as well.
- To close, I want to share a time when a flood light came on me so I could no longer pretend not to understand or not to see oppression. Please bear with my ignorance as I share this story. I've placed myself to work with a wide variety of people. Actually, I won't say that I did it. God did it. God placed me. Over the years, I've worked with and built relationships nearly every major people group from Latinos to African-Americans to Asians to Caribbean to Native American. I love diversity. I love the variety that God created among us.
- But, I have struggled over the years understanding the anger from other people groups. I've been in groups where I'm the only or one of the only white people and I can feel animosity. I don't like it. And, I didn't really understand it. In my mind, I'm one of the good guys. What are you angry with me for? Why are you judging me?
 - I called it the angry black person syndrome. This anger in some black folk that come out and taint a whole discussion or stop a whole discussion. I mean, I kind of understood some of the anger. I got that there is systemic racism in our country and that people are not treated fairly.
 - But, didn't people know that they were just shooting themselves in the foot by coming across so angry and confrontational? It wasn't helping their cause or making people (white people) want to listen to them. Instead, it just makes people uncomfortable and not want to even enter into a discussion with them.
- Then, this past June, I traveled to Anderson, IN for a Board of Directors meeting of Christian Women Connection of the Church of God. I serve on the board as the female clergy representative. We were asked to read a book before coming to the meeting called *The*

Road to Reconciliation. We were going to have a discussion on reconciliation. It was all prompted because of some animosity and statements made mostly by white women about how “black” the last women’s convention was and even how there were too many black women there.

- Prior to the discussion, we took a “white privilege” test. Basically, there are statements and you mark if they are true for you or not. Let me give you a couple of examples...
 - As you can see, I could mark a bunch of them. But, this one – my children will be taught about their culture. I couldn’t mark. Of course they wouldn’t because my children are half Haitian. The schools here aren’t going to teach Haitian culture.
 - But, then some light started to shine. I start to think, “Which ones will my boys not be able to mark?” I started to think of things I hadn’t thought before or maybe never allowed myself to think before. Things like, “I’m going to have to teach my boys things that my parents never had to teach my brothers or my brothers won’t have to teach their sons or daughters.” Things like there are places where you won’t be welcome. Places where you might not want to stay because you might not be safe. We will have to teach them how to handle themselves if they are ever pulled over.
 - Honestly, that one makes me nervous. Many here know our oldest, Josiah. He is prone to pop off at the mouth and question and challenge authority. Ya’ll he makes me nervous.
 - The list went on.
- Then, I started to get angry. ANGRY. I knew of the injustice. I knew that my husband had experienced racism – being pulled over for no reason and being asked what he’s doing here with his accent. Believe me, no one gets discriminated against more than a black man with an accent. I knew it. And, it made me angry. But not to this level.
- I’m not sure why it didn’t click though – maybe because my husband is an adult who can deal with it. But our children - that was different. Maybe because I didn’t really know what to do and so it was easier to not focus too much. Maybe it didn’t click because it wasn’t personal enough. I thought it was, but it wasn’t. I don’t know.
 - Maybe it’s because the light hadn’t illuminated all of the dark places in my heart to reveal things I was avoiding because they were uncomfortable. I thought I had pushed my comfort zones, but maybe I had been avoiding certain areas of being uncomfortable - until it had to do with my boys.
 - Then, the light pierced and I was angry. Why do my beautiful, bright, wonderful children have to deal with this? Why? Because I chose to marry a godly, faithful, hard-working man who is black? How ridiculous!
 - Then it clicked – the anger in others who experience what I was anticipating my children possibly facing. The anger in others who look at their children, who are as beautiful, bright, wonderful and precious as my boys, and know their children are going to have to deal with things that other children will not have to deal with. The anger that comes as they also ask “why do my children have to deal with this?” The light broke me.

- Now, I better understand and I can react or relate in a different way so that peace might come. But, it took God's light to shine to dispel the darkness that I was living in that it would be different for my children. It took God's light to shine to show me that I have become too comfortable with oppression.
 - o What needs to be different is me. I need to get more uncomfortable. It's how I relate to people. It's how I show mercy even if anger is unjustly directed at me. It's how I use my white privilege to stand up for those of color, not just my boys or my husband or for those I love, but for anyone I see being oppressed.
 - o My white brothers and sisters, it's how we stand up and become advocates for those who are oppressed because of race or ethnicity. We need to stop wanting to be comfortable and be OK with being uncomfortable.
 - o We can use our white privilege to react, not in fear or to pretend that oppression is not there, but to stand up against systemic wrongs in our society. We can be a voice, a voice of peace. We can be a light, the light of peace. We can proclaim and shine in the darkness for unity and real reconciliation and for an end to systemic oppression.

- As a woman in ministry, the greatest support comes not from other women in ministry, but from men in ministry who come alongside women clergy and say to those nay-sayers that women can be called by God and here are the Biblical foundations that declare that truth.
 - o As a white woman, I can help share with my white brothers and sisters where the anger comes from. I can help people understand. I can shed some light on the subject. And, I can be heard in a way that someone of color may not be able to be heard.
 - o In fact, during the discussion we had at that board meeting, Arnetta Bailey, the Director of CWC and who is black, asked my friend, Mary, who is the Ministry Coordinator for CWC and who is white, to facilitate the discussion on reconciliation because she knew that the majority of those present would be white and she knew that they wouldn't share as much if she facilitated the discussion.
 - o We must come alongside our brothers and sisters of color. We must speak for their anger. We must give a voice to them when someone else won't be able to hear their voice. We must stand up against oppression and use our white privilege, which most definitely was intended for evil and turn it on its head and use it for good and for the glory of the Prince of Peace!

- My brothers and sisters of color, you also have a privilege. You are able to reach people with the gospel of peace and light that I will never be able to reach. You are able to touch folks who will never be open to someone like me to even get near. And, you are able to share your experience with the Prince of Peace in a way that can be better accepted than any sermon I could ever preach.
 - o There are people who are being oppressed by sin and darkness and you are the light that can break through. You cannot pretend that it is not your calling or your

ministry. You cannot turn a blind eye or pretend that you are not called. You are!
Be a giver of the light of peace!

- Share that the Prince of peace is not a white man's God. Jesus wasn't even white! He is the God who gives hope to the hopeless and a voice to the voiceless. The government might not listen, treaties might be forsaken, policies are not honored – but there is a God who hears and who sees and who understands and who came. All of these earthly things are not the final say – God is the final say!
 - There is a God who sent his Son to burst through the darkness of oppression to set people free. They don't have to be bound by both sin and societal oppression. They can experience freedom from sin which then transcends oppression!
 - The freedom that you have found in Jesus is desperately needed and you are desperately needed to share it.
- And, we all live in privilege. It is the privilege of living here – in a country where we are free to worship and where we have more than the far majority of the world. And, we live in a privilege that we have seen a great light!
- We must, then, proclaim that light! We must proclaim that regardless of what the world proclaims, the peace of God assures those who have not been given a voice, that God does hear them. Those whom the world keeps oppressed the peace of God sets free! This is the peace that Jesus leaves with us. This is the peace that we are to embrace and live out in our lives. The peace of God has broken through a land of darkness and the righteousness and justice of God is to replace the injustice of the world!
 - Arise, shine, for your light of peace has come! The darkness doesn't have to take over ever again! Peace has come! Light has come! Christ has come! Let's take the Light of Peace to the world!