

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Light, Life and Healing"
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Fourth Sunday in Lent

There once was a man who would take a walk in his neighborhood. He enjoyed walking. He walked during the day and he walked at night. He had several routes he liked but he had one preferred route that he did over and over again. He also took this route at night. The problem was that there was a hole in the sidewalk that puts our street potholes to shame. You could literally be swallowed up by this hole and for some reason the city chose to never place warning signs around it.

So you can guess what happened. The man would go on his walk and most of the time on most of the routes he had no problem. But on this particular street and on this particular sidewalk, day after day, he walked into this hole. He hurt his ankle, his leg, he fell and broke an arm once. He kept injuring himself. The question of course was "Why did he keep going down that same road and injure himself on that same sidewalk time after time after time?" When his doctor asked him about this on one of the occasions of one of his injuries, he replied that he liked that street and that walk, and he wasn't going to let that hole bother him. Upon being asked why he went that way at night, he simply shrugged his shoulders.

Now you might not have much sympathy for that man, nor perhaps for the woman who drinks too much every weekend, not just on St. Patrick's Day. You may not care very much about the drug addict who uses up his life savings for pills or injections; nor the man who rips off the church or his clients to pay for hours on the video lottery terminals. Or how do you feel about the person who can't keep their mouth shut with derogatory and disrespectful remarks, even if it causes them to lose their job or their closest relationships?

Each of us have fatal flaws within. Mostly we don't see them because self-perspective is difficult in the dark. Have you ever met someone who tries on new clothes in the dark, or who puts on make-up with no lights and no mirror? We come week by week in part because we need a new light from the Lord to shed perspective on who we are, what we are living, what our choices are and whether we have the courage or the desire to do what God encourages us to do.

Those holes that the man fell into were not in the sidewalk, but in his soul, in his life, in his emotions, in his spirit. But of course, until we admit we need the help to not injure ourselves and others, then, not much can be done. We simply go the way we know. And we encounter the holes in different ways. The question is "What is the hole in your life?" Where do you need help? Why do you spend the off-hours the way you do during the week?

The problem that many of us face is that our spirituality is simply another layer of social concern or another "activity" amongst many important activities. We do not believe we are perishing without consciously giving ourselves to God, as I mentioned last week from 1 Corinthians 1:18. So we equally don't believe that we are "dead in our trespasses and sins" that Paul says in Ephesians 2:1. We are not physically dead without God, but are spiritually dead when we say "no" to God's program in our lives, to God's intervention in our lives, to God's Word at the center of our lives.

So before we can even come close to experience the fullness of what Jesus means by life, we first discover the holes in ourselves, the rebellion against God, the character defects, the deathly, dark side of who we are and how others experience us. It's why we have confession of sins every week as an important part of the service, some might say the most important part.

In Numbers 24, I'm sure the people in the desert didn't know they were complaining and being impatient with God and Moses when God sent the snakes instead of the water or better food, because they still had the manna. They just were going along with the way they were. They only realized how bad the situation was when the snakes were biting some and some were dying. It took the crisis to alert them to their spiritual condition and their complaining. This continues to today. You and I don't consider where we are with God until some crisis overtakes us.

So in the darkness of our sin, Jesus holds up a light. The light first exposes the sin. Then the truth of our acknowledging our sin, spoken to God, and the desire to turn from it becomes the major project of our lives. You and I were dead in your and my trespasses and sins, says Paul. This was not simply a figure of speech. It really means that we have no life, and no light, just a non-response, a non-activity toward God, a rejection of relationship with God and a hellish loneliness that goes along with that rejection of that relationship. That is the darkness.

But in Christ, although we know we still have a tendency to rebel, we choose rather to listen to God, and to choose God's ways. We do so, not only for our own sake, but for those around us who care about us.

As we do, we realize that we don't have to complain or express bitterness, but rather release these complaints and bitterness to God, through forgiveness and thanksgiving. If we are unaccustomed to praying, we can simply say to God, Thank you for... and begin to list with what we appreciate in life. We can also bring our acts of forgiveness to God as well, Lord, I release Joe and Josephine to you, for hurting me, I know you know what they have done, I don't know whether they have done so consciously or not, I forgive them and ask you to deal with them, and I choose to not hold this sin against them, but rather treat them with love and grace the way you treat me. You and I will be transformed as we walk in forgiveness and thankfulness rather than bitterness and demanding our rights.

It's hard to walk out of the darkness, because when you are in the dark you can say to yourself and to God that it's not my fault and there's nothing I can do. But in fact we always have choices. In the dark, we can blame God, which he can take, but does it help us? In the light, we can see Jesus and all that he has done to bring us into relationship with God.

It's hard to come out of the darkness, because there are painful realities to be seen. Maybe you were abandoned as a child or youngster or adult. I was. Perhaps you experienced the sting of betrayal or knew the feelings of alienation, rejection on sports teams or relationships with the opposite sex, or comments about the way you look. A child takes such rejections deeply into himself or herself.

We in turn are invited to bring such pain into the light, to experience the life of Jesus and his healing power. But such does not take place in the dark. We need the courage to change, starting with acknowledging what still lies in the dark. We need others to help us have a safe place to speak out the things that still are killing us inside. I would hope our small groups provide such a place. 12 step groups in the community also provide such a place.

John 3:16 is about salvation. The problem is many of us think that salvation is only a one time event, when we publically profess our faith, whether as a young person, or as an adult having their child baptized or at some other time where you privately gave your life to the Lord. These are salvation

moments, but salvation is an ongoing process. Salvation is also the process God leads us through to make us more God's own, sanctified, set apart to God, delivered not only from the sin that separates us from God but also the sins against us that keep us down in the dark, believing lies, and drowning us in shame and guilt. Salvation happened when we gave our life to God, but it continues to happen as we are delivered from many sins, rebellions and brokenness. Salvation will finally happen when we are with the Lord, gone from this body into a new one, in the presence of Jesus.

I encourage you to find a place to be honest, where you can speak out the things that trouble you, where you can let the light come into those places that have been killing you. There are parts inside me that I feed that I should be starving and other parts that I should be feeding that I am starving. I am being vague to say that I need places to be open and honest about my interior struggles, no matter how terrible or how common. I believe you do too.

When we open up, we find others, most others have the same struggles as we do and rather than rejecting us because of these struggles, they love us all the more. This is one path of healing which simply comes with honesty, toward God and toward one another. I pray we will have more and more places in this church and in this city where we can experience the light and life of the Lord in the midst of our darkness and dying. I have experienced healing as I have been courageous enough to be honest with others. I trust you will too.

Let us pray.