

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

THIS ADVENT SEASON WE HAVE TALKED ABOUT PREPARING FOR THE LIGHT, SEEING THE LIGHT. **THIS THIRD WEEK IN ADVENT WE WILL LOOK INTO WALKING IN THE LIGHT.** WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “WALK IN THE LIGHT”? HOW DO WE “WALK IN THE LIGHT”? WHY SHOULD WE “WALK IN THE LIGHT”? THOSE ARE ALL GOOD QUESTIONS TO ASK, BECAUSE IN OUR LIVES IF WE DO NOT KNOW WHY WE ARE TO “WALK IN THE LIGHT” AND WHAT THAT MEANS FOR US ON OUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY THEN IT MAKES NO SENSE AND IS OF NO USE IN OUR DAILY LIVES.

I STRONGLY BELIEVE, AS MANY OF YOU, THAT BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES WHEN USED IN OUR DAILY LIVES MAKE A DIFFERENCE NOT ONLY IN OUR LIVES, BUT EVEN MORE IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS! IF WE ARE NOT MAKING A DIFFERENCE, WHY NOT? WHEN WE “WALK IN THE LIGHT” WE WILL BY GOD'S GRACE MAKE A DIFFERENCE. IT IS AN INTERESTING FACT THAT WHEN A RELATIVE OR FRIEND PASSES WE FOCUS ON THE IMPACT THEY HAD MADE ON OUR LIFE.

THAT IS WHY IT IS IMPORTANT IN OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE TO “WALK IN THE LIGHT” - TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, BECAUSE IF WE DON'T WHO WILL? THERE ARE MANY PHILOSOPHIES AND IDEALS THAT ARE GOOD OUT THERE IN THE WORLD, **BUT FOR ME WHEN WE “WALK IN THE LIGHT” AND FOLLOW GOD'S WORD IT WILL MAKE US NOT ONLY GOOD PEOPLE, BUT RAISE US, BY THE GRACE OF GOD, TO BE THE BEST PEOPLE WE CAN BE.**

LISTEN TO THE STORIES OF MANY OF THE MEDAL OF HONOR

WINNERS AND YOU REALIZE THEIR FAITH. “WALKING IN THE LIGHT” WAS A KEY AND SUSTAINED THEM. IT IS A COMPELLING REASON FOR US TO KNOW AND APPLY TO OUR LIVES WHAT IT TAKES TO “WALK IN THE LIGHT”.

IF WE ARE TO BE A DISCIPLE OF JESUS, THEN IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE KNOW HIS TEACHING AND HOW IT APPLIES TO OUR LIVES. ONE OF THE BEST REASONS TO WALK IN THE LIGHT IS FOUND IN I JOHN 1:7 *“But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.”* **WHEN WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD WE WILL KNOW HOW TO WALK IN THE LIGHT.** DOES THAT MEAN WE WALK WITHOUT A STUMBLE OR TRIP? NO. **WHEN WE DO WALK IN THE LIGHT WE ARE AWARE OF OUR SIN AND CAN UNDERSTAND FULLY THE GRACE OF GOD IN OUR LIVES. IT IS AT SUCH A POINT IN OUR LIVES OUR SPIRITUAL EYES “SEE”.**

GOD IS NOT SOME SCARY IMAGE SITTING THERE WAITING TO PUNISH HIS CHILDREN. **GOD LOVES US IN HUMAN TERMS WE CAN NOT DESCRIBE.** HE SENT HIS SON TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT. KNOWING THIS PEOPLE SUCH AS PAUL, JOHN WESLEY, AND OTHERS SAW WITH THEIR SPIRITUAL EYES AND KNEW IN THEIR HEARTS THAT GOD'S GRACE WAS REAL. IT IS SOMETHING WE LIVE IN EACH AND EVERY DAY.

YOU KNOW I DON'T FOCUS A LARGE AMOUNT OF SERMON TIME ON THE SINFUL CREATURES WE ARE, BECAUSE THROUGH LOVE AND GRACE WE CAN HAVE THIS RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD HIMSELF, THAT HE SO DESIRES, BUT DO WE? **GOD GIVES US ADVENT, EVERY YEAR, TO PREPARE, TO SEE AGAIN THE GIFT HE HAS GIVEN WITH THE BIRTH OF SON AND AS THE PHRASE GOES "THE GIFT THAT KEEPS GIVING" -- THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, YEAR AFTER YEAR.**

PREPARING DURING ADVENT FOR THE BIRTH OF JESUS, SEEING THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD COME ALIVE IN A MANGER AS GOD HAS PROMISED SHOULD ENCOURAGE US ANEW IN OUR HEARTS AND SPIRITS TO "WALK IN THE LIGHT". WHY "WALK" ANY OTHER WAY?

I WILL ASK THIS QUESTION *"ARE YOU PERSONALLY SATISFIED WHERE YOU ARE ON YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY THIS ADVENT SEASON?"* ALL THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT AND EVEN OUR FOUNDER, JOHN WESLEY, TELL US **IT IS A LIFE LONG PROCESS OF "BECOMING", AND IN THE RELIGIOUS VOCABULARY WE NAME IT AS SANCTIFICATION. WE MUST NEVER BE SATISFIED WHERE WE ARE SPIRITUALLY UNTIL WE TAKE OUR LAST BREATH!!!** CHRIST NEVER DID, EVEN ON THE CROSS, HE FOUND ONE LAST TIME TO FORGIVE. BY GOD'S GRACE AND THE GUIDANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WE WILL CONTINUE TO GROW SPIRITUALLY.

ADVENT IS ONE OF THOSE TIMES IN THE CHURCH YEAR NOT UNLIKE LENT WHERE WE CAN PAUSE AND LOOK AROUND TO SEE WHERE WE ARE. NO ONE ELSE CAN DO IT FOR YOU. ONLY YOU AND GOD KNOW WHAT IS IN YOUR HEART AND SPIRIT. IT IS THE REASON RELATIONSHIPS ARE SO IMPORTANT IN OUR FAITH WALK. **WHEN WE HAVE THAT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THE FATHER AND HIS SON JESUS CHRIST WE WILL "WALK IN THE LIGHT" AND BE ABLE TO LOVE THAT NEIGHBOR AS OUR SELF.** BY SERVING IN THE COMMUNITY IN WAYS TOO NUMEROUS TO MENTION. IT IS BECAUSE OF THE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. THERE IS NO WAY WE AS HUMANS CAN MUSTER UP ENOUGH LOVE TO SERVE THOSE WE DO NOT KNOW. IT IS THAT "SPARK" OF GOD'S LOVE IN US THAT ALLOWS US TO SAY *"HERE I AM LORD, SEND ME"*.

THE QUESTION REMAINS "HOW DO I WALK IN THE LIGHT"? GOD'S PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE, MY LIFE, IS NOT COMPLICATED, BUT WE TEND TO MAKE IT THAT WAY! **WALKING IN THE LIGHT MEANS GOD WILL "FILL IN THE BLANKS" IF WE MAKE OUR SELF AVAILABLE.** IN THE BIBLE GOD GAVE HIS SERVANTS ALL THEY NEEDED TO DO THAT WHICH HE CALLED THEM TO.

I HAVE HEARD, AT TIMES, INDIVIDUALS SAY TO ME *"PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO CHANGE OR MAKE THE EFFORT TO"*. WELL, I DON'T BELIEVE IN MY HEART THAT PEOPLE DON'T DESIRE TO IMPROVE. *CHANGE CAN MEAN DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE.* I UNDERSTAND FOR MANY OF US WE DON'T LIKE IT WHEN THE ROUTINE IS TURNED UPSIDE DOWN OR PHYSICAL THINGS CHANGE AROUND US, BUT THAT IS NOT THE KIND OF CHANGE I AM TALKING ABOUT. CHANGE IN RELATION TO ADVENT AND OUR SPIRITUAL LIVES IS WHAT IS BEING REFERRED TO.

AS YOUR PASTOR IT IS IN THE JOB DESCRIPTION GOD GIVES WHEN CALLING US THAT WE HELP HIS PEOPLE TO STRETCH, TO GROW, MAINLY BY TEACHING AND PREACHING. ALSO TO CHALLENGE YOU AND MYSELF TO BE BETTER DISCIPLES TOMORROW THAN TODAY. NO ONE CAN DO THIS ALONE. THAT IS WHY WE ARE IN COMMUNITY TO HELP EACH OTHER.

HOW MANY VERSES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT SPEAK OF THE WAYS WE SHOULD TREAT ONE ANOTHER IN WORD AND ACTION? **HOW MANY TIMES DID PAUL ADDRESS THE VARIOUS CHURCHES HE HELPED BIRTH, ENCOURAGING THEM TO “WALK IN THE LIGHT” TO SOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS – MANY OF THE SAME PROBLEMS WE HAVE IN CHURCHES TODAY – GOSSIP, ENVY, WRONG ATTITUDES AND BEING UNFORGIVING.**

ONE OF THE MOST SPIRITUALLY “RICH” CHURCHES, THE ONE AT CORINTH HAD NUMEROUS PROBLEMS. **PAUL WANTED THE CHURCH TO BE ALL THEY COULD BE TO CARRY ON GOD’S WORK. GOD’S DESIRE IS THIS FOR CENTENNIAL TO CARRY OUT WHAT HE HAS SET BEFORE IT.** I BELIEVE OUR MISSION STATEMENT IS THAT TASK AND *HOW DO WE CARRY THAT OUT?* WE PRAY AND WAIT ON GOD, AND GOD WILL SHOW US, BUT NOT IF WE DON’T PRAY AND SEEK HIS GUIDANCE.

WALKING IN THE LIGHT IS NOT JUST SOME CATCH PHRASE WE USE IN THE CHURCH. IT HAS CLEAR MEANING. LET’S SAY IT COMES WITH AN INSTRUCTION MANUAL.

FIRST OF ALL, IF WE ARE GOING TO WALK IN THE LIGHT, WHAT IS IT WE ARE WALKING IN? IT SEEMS A FAIRLY BASIC QUESTION, BUT FOR MANY WHO READ OR HEAR THE WORDS AND JUST FILE THEM IN THE BACK OF THE HEAD, NEVER REALLY THINKING ABOUT THE WORDS THEY HAVE HEARD.

LIGHT AS OPPOSED TO DARKNESS ENABLES THINGS TO BE DONE. LIGHT WILL HELP CROPS GROW, WE CAN WORK MUCH BETTER WHEN THE LIGHT IS ON. LIGHT CAN PROVIDE SAFETY. NUMBERS TELL US THAT THE HIGHEST RATE OF CRIME IS COMMITTED AND CENTERED AROUND 4 AM, IN THE DARKEST HOURS. SHIP OPERATORS LOOK FOR THAT LIGHT OF THE LIGHTHOUSE FOR SAFETY FROM ROCKS AND SHALLOWS. LIGHT REPRESENTS GOOD, PURE, HOLY AND TRUE. LIGHT REVEALS THINGS.

IN THE BIBLE, **LIGHT IS RELATED TO THE TRUTH, BECAUSE LIGHT CAN EXPOSE WHATEVER EXISTS – GOOD OR BAD.** IF WE WANT TO SEE WHERE WE ARE GOING, WE “WALK IN THE LIGHT”. WE ARE AWARE WHAT LIES BEFORE US AND KNOWING WHAT TO AVOID. WHEN PEOPLE WALK IN DARKNESS THEY LACK UNDERSTANDING AND THERE IS DANGER.

JESUS IS REFERRED TO AS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. ISAIAH’S PROPHECY TOLD THAT *“The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.* AS WE PREPARE FOR THE LIGHT, THE BABY JESUS, WE WILL SEE THE LIGHT WE MUST FOLLOW AND IN FOLLOWING HIM WE WILL WALK IN THE LIGHT.

AFTER ALL JESUS SAID IN JOHN 8:12 *"I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."* **AGAIN THE CHALLENGE IN HEARING THESE WORDS IS, DO WE BELIEVE THEM WITHIN OR ARE THEY JUST WORDS THAT WE HAVE HEARD OVER AND OVER AGAIN TO A POINT THERE IS NO MEANING?** ADVENT IS MADE FOR SUCH A SITUATION WHERE WE PREPARE AND SEE ANEW THE BABY JESUS. WE CAN BEGIN TO WALK IN THE LIGHT REALLY CELEBRATING HIS BIRTH WITH DEEPER MEANING. EPHESIANS 5:8 *"For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light"*.

WHEN WE DO WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT WE HAVE LITERALLY "THROWN OFF" THE OLD NATURE GALATIANS 5:16-18 *"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit."*

THIS IS HOW IT IS TO BE "WALKING IN THE LIGHT" AND IN EPHESIANS 5:8-11 *"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness.."*

IN CLOSING HERE IS A STORY FROM A PERSON I THINK WE CAN ALL RELATE TO..

Have you ever found yourself walking around in the dark? A few nights ago I found myself in that exact position. I was up getting a glass of water in the middle of the night. I didn't turn the lights on because I didn't want to disturb anyone. So, still half asleep, I made my way from the bedroom to the kitchen. Somewhere between the kitchen and the bedroom I discovered a doorknob with my hip. I walked right into one of the doors in the hallway as I made my way down the hall. I must admit that this was not the most pleasant experience or one of my more graceful moments. I firmly believe that the whole incident was caused by walking in the dark. Things would have gone a lot differently if I had been walking in that hallway with the lights on. Life is so much easier when we walk in the light.

ADVENT MEANS PREPARING FOR THE LIGHT, SEEING AND REALIZING WHO IS THE LIGHT, AND WALKING IN THE LIGHT OF JESUS. IT IS THEN THAT THE WORDS, THE PEOPLE OF THIS SEASON TAKE ON NEW MEANING AND RESULT IN OUR LIVES AND FAITH BEING RENEWED. AMEN.