

“Lights On!” - Canon Larry Hill

Holy Trinity Cathedral - 1/22/2017

Matt. 4:12-17

Many, many thanks to our dear friends from Shirley Grace. Your ministry is not only meeting a great need... but even more importantly, it honors God. It honors God, because your work takes seriously the truth that we human beings are made in the very image of God Almighty.

As David said in our Psalm today... Psalm 139:13. “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. 14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” I know that God has and will continue to bless your ministry at Shirley Grace because you so honor Him.

If there is anything we need in family, church and society at large, it is a recovery of honoring God. For decades now, God has been viewed by many in the western world as irrelevant and, for all practical purposes, dead... and the results have not been good.

Since the end of the 19th century, when Nietzsche said that “God is dead, God remains dead. And we have killed him,” the world has become far more menacing. Indeed, the 20th was the bloodiest century in the history of the world...And the evidence from this young century has not yet signaled much change in that reality.

When God is not honored... and likewise His values...Values that endow us with meaning and purpose...Values that establish equity and justice for all...When God is not honored... those who play god step into that void.

And we have been witness to some of the most ruthless individuals and institutions in history stepping into that void and playing god... bringing devastation to humanity... and that includes the abortion industry. How we need a recovery of honoring God in our day and in our culture.

Please turn to our Gospel lesson in Matthew 4...In our gospel lesson, Jesus moves to Capernaum... which may seem to be an insignificant detail... but not so, as Matthew reminds us in v. 14...Jesus does so... He moves to the N.W. shore of the sea, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, given way back in the 8th cent. B.C. It was during that time, that the Assyrians (Nineveh, Mosul) invaded that area... and, by 722, defeated the whole of the northern kingdom of Israel. They were a brutal empire...They were the ISIS of their day...“skinning their prisoners alive, and cutting off various body parts to inspire terror in their enemies.” And in keeping with their policy of conquest, they deported from Galilee much of the Jewish population. As one historian writes, they did so “in order to destroy their sense of nationalism, and break any pride or hope of rebellion”... they deported them, “and replaced them with strangers from far away.”

Isaiah foresaw this takeover by the Assyrians and prophesied the words that Matthew quotes here in our Gospel lesson. He foresaw the awful judgment that was about to befall the people of Galilee...

Judgement because they followed after false gods and spurned the word of the Lord...Judgement, because the people had failed to honor God. And thus, Isaiah described this region as a place of darkness...the land of the shadow of death.

I don't know about you, but as I look across at the spiritual and moral landscape of our country...The division... the slander and deceit... the unrepentant corruption... the bullying and virulent hatred of people of differing points of view...A culture that has to a significant, if not large degree, embraced death as an answer to the stresses and burdens of life...And embraced it as a means of covering up its shameful lusts...As I look at the spiritual landscape, I think it is fair to say that this darkness is virulent (harsh) and toxic...To the point that there is little outrage at a government that refuses to defend the weakest among us...Little outrage at a million plus dead babies every year...over 60 million since 1973...Little outrage at the selling of baby body parts for profit. How debased... how depraved ... how utterly dark is the darkness in which we live in these modern times?

Jesus put it this way in John 3:19. "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." Darkness abounds... but listen is not the end of the picture... or even the primary emphasis of our Gospel today...Look at v. 16 again...the people living in darkness... what?...have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death... a light has dawned."

The good news... the great news as prophesied by Isaiah... and announced in the Gospel... the darkness is being dispelled...The Light is shining in the darkness... and the darkness, as John writes in his Gospel... the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:5 ESV). Indeed it cannot overcome it. The darkness of our world... The darkness of our times spiritually speaking, cannot and will not extinguish the light...For it is the light of the One who is life and truth and grace and love and mercy. It is the light of Christ... a great light... a powerful light... a light that can never be put out!

By going here to this region...Note, Jesus doesn't go to the center of faith in Israel... to Jerusalem... No, He goes to the region that experienced and became symbolic of spiritual blindness, callousness, indifference... apathy... evil and, yes, even the demonic. The region where judgment fell. By going here, Jesus shows us that it is His aim, His goal, His mission to dispel, defeat, and ultimately destroy the darkness that grips our world... and even our lives.

As He says in John 12:46, "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. (John 12:46). On this sanctity of life Sunday, we have the hope, the promise, the guarantee that the darkness that has shrouded our nation cannot and will not win. The abortion culture will lose!...Because the Light of Christ has come... and nothing will be able to put out His light. No argument formed against Him... no argument formed against the truth that all life is sacred will ultimately prevail.

And I think it is particularly pregnant how the Light that dispels and defeats the darkness of our world comes to us...Listen as Isaiah continues his prophecy just a few verses later... "For to us a

child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

God’s answer to the darkness of the world is the birth of a child... The Child who is Mighty God... who will be enthroned and establish justice and righteousness. I don’t want to press this too hard, but to me every baby...every such gift from God... is a reminder of... maybe even symbolic of the Child who is Light and opposes the darkness of the world and our lives.

While every abortion... no matter how much it is wrapped in practical and personal matters... is spiritually speaking an attempt to snuff out the Light of Christ...Like Herod in Bethlehem...Like the great dragon, Satan himself, in Rev. 12 who wanted to devour the Child. But remember, they didn’t win and neither will their descendent, the abortion industry. Nothing, nothing, nothing will be able to put out the light of Christ.

There’s one more facet to the victory of the Light of Christ...Turn to Matthew 5:14–16 14. “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

Just one chapter later... in Jesus’ most famous sermon, He tells us how we are part of this victory. “You are the light of the world.” As the moon reflects the light of the sun, we are to reflect the Light of the Sun of Righteousness. If we are to see a rebuilding a renewing of the honor of God in our worlds, Jesus is saying that you... we are the means of that renewal.

We have to take seriously our role that was thrust upon us at our baptisms... when the priest handed you or your parents that symbol of the light of Christ... and said to you... Let your light so shine before men. Our lives, our words, our actions have to reflect the Light of Christ that is within us.

For too long now, we Christians have been putting our lamp under a bowl. Whether it is fear of ridicule if we dare try to promote the love and truth of Christ...Whether it is fear of being labeled as some form of hatemonger...or some other fear, we have been cowered into the ghettos of our church buildings, allowing the forces of darkness, that we have no voice in the public square... that our religion is purely a private matter... not so, not true!

In love, in kindness we need to recover our boldness in reflecting the Light of Christ...We need to recover the confidence that His Light has and is and will dispel the darkness. And if we would help restore the honor of God in our culture, I cannot think of a more important issue in which we need to shine the Light of Christ, than the issue of the right to life.

The former Surgeon General of the U.S., Dr. C. Everett Koop...who was probably the leading pediatric surgeon in our country in that era... wrote these words: “In my opinion, this is the most important issue the church has ever faced, and it has changed my life. I am no longer just a pediatric surgeon. God has given me a tremendous opportunity to take this view of the sanctity of unborn life

to the Christian public. I am convinced that this is the most important thing God has ever given me to say. If you believe the universe came about by chance, that you and I evolved from primordial ooze, then there is no unique dignity to human life. Why worry about it? But if you believe that man was created in the image of God and that he has total, unique, specific specialness, then he should be protected to the best of our ability for ALL of his lifetime.”

Thank you, Shirley Grace, for letting Christ’s light shine through you...

Brothers and sisters... let's live and move and act and speak in the confidence that The Light has shined in the darkness... and guess what? The darkness will lose!