

Text: *Isaiah 9:2* “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.”

*Matthew 4:23* “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news. . .”

### **Living the Bright Light of the Good News**

As I left the office of my ophthalmologist this week the outside light blinded me. My sunglasses were in the car, and the light was so bright that I could not even open my eyes enough to make my way to the car. Linda had to bring the car to me. For the next thirty minutes or so, I craved darkness and was only comfortable when my eyes were shut. A land of deep darkness was my preferred environment; only for a few minutes, then light was once again welcomed.

I am always amazed at how many people live in a land of deep darkness. I don't mean people who are physically blind, but rather people who are spiritually and psychologically blind. We have millions of such people in the U.S., most of whom identify themselves as Christian. What an unhappy world they live in. It is a world of lies, greed and fear.

**Lies** are the accepted currency of their interactions with their fellow humans. Rejecting the Jesus-centered theology of love and the science-centered observed world of facts, they create a fictional world based on the uncritical acceptance of falsehoods as their personal reality. In the spiritual world this helps to explain why the fastest growing religious group in the U.S. is none. In the secular world it goes far towards explaining the depth of social divisions in our country.

In the land of deep darkness **greed and self-interest** are the primary motivators. The inhabitants of that land judge the worthwhileness of people by the wealth they are able to accumulate. Self-interest is the only legitimate interest; some minimal order might be necessary to allow business to operate but a community of co-operative interests is antithetical to the primary human function of accumulation.

In the darkness created by lies, greed and self-interest, it is understandable that **fear** is the **dominant social environment**. In this atmosphere of fear people turn against one another. Frequently the fear results in people turning against themselves, seeing only failure from their past and hopelessness in their future. High suicide rates bear tragic testimony to the social isolation that such fear produces.

This is where we need to heed the Psalmist's joyful cry: The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?" Those whose lived in deep darkness, even on them, light has shined. This is the Land of Light, the Good News Land. It is, first of all, a **land of truth**. Science, as a systematic and self-correcting way of observing natural phenomena gives us a standard by which we measure truth against falsehoods. Applying reason and tradition to the *Bible*, we may discern spiritual direction in the here and now. Right reason tells us when to stand firm, when to compromise and when to profoundly change. Truth is our sword and our shield.

Good news land is also characterized by self-interest being replaced by **self-worth**. We don't have to find external validation of our worth or success. We are created in the image of God with the marvelous capacity of freedom of choice. From a religious perspective, we have the burden of sin removed from upon us. There is no essential or primordial evil within us. We may create our devils, but that is a choice we make. We are intrinsically worthwhile.

Truth and self-worth are made real by the foundation stone of our existence: **Love**. As Michael Curry, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church said recently, “If it is not about love, it's not about God.” God is not about judgement, hell-fire and damnation. God is certainly not a Bible pounder. God is love. That is the very essence of the Good News that we celebrate. Our task is to reflect some of God's love out into the larger world.

God's love brings us to a most essential element in our Land of Light: **Community**. People who say that they are against religious institutions, but are for spirituality are most often ignoring the community aspects of organized religion. We may define community virtually, although I prefer face to face interactions in groups as my definition. In any case, the community needs to reflect God's love

through the care of its' least functional and all those with special needs. God's community is the answer to the kind of toxic rugged individualism that has proved to be so destructive of human dignity. The kind of tribalism that we see today is a community bound together by hate. Christians build communities based on love.

We do not have to live, even for a moment, in the land of deep darkness. The Good News is that the bright light shines on us and calls us to reflect that light on all we encounter in our lives. We are among the blessed: We are living the bright light of the good news. Amen