

Sermon 090918 Darkness and Light
Scripture John 1: 1-5
Sermon Title The Meaning of Life

We just heard verse five of the first chapter in John's Gospel, "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it." This is one of many, many references to shining light in to darkness in the Bible. This includes, of course, the first chapter in Genesis where on the first day the Creator said, "Let there be light."

No other image appears as often in the Bible, both Old and New Testaments as the contrast between darkness and light. We talk about Christianity being the religion of second chances, which is absolutely true.

You've heard the image used in many a sermon including by this preacher. We talk of eventually overcoming grief in terms like, 'every night is followed by the dawn of a new day'. St John of the Cross wrote about 'the dark night of the soul.' This is the notion, and I don't mind telling you it has happened to me, when you enter into deep crisis, whether emotional or spiritual or both, end emerge stronger and better equipped to deal with life's challenges. That which doesn't kill you makes you stronger. You go out of the deep darkness into the bright light.

The image even makes it into our hymnody. One of my favorite hymns is "Precious Lord, Take My Hand"

(singing)

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, help me stand.

I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.

Through the storm, through the night,

Lead me on to the light, take my hand,

Precious Lord, lead me home.

I'd like to tell you a story about this darkness and light thing. It is not my story. I read it in a book called, 'What on Earth Have I Done?' by Robert Fulghum. Robert Fulghum's best known book is 'Everything I Need To Know I Learned in Kindergarten.'

Fulghum is still writing books. He is a Unitarian Universalist Minister who now splits his time between Utah and the Greek Island of Crete. Fulghum is known as a quirky kind of guy. That comes through if you read his books. This story is from his time in Crete.

A little note of history here. During WWII, the Nazis invaded Crete. Locals resisted in every way possible including stabbing Nazis with kitchen forks. There are horrific stories of entire populations of towns and villages being killed by the Germans.

So, Robert Fulghum lives near an institute called, The Orthodox Academy of Crete. Fulghum enjoys many of the seminars offered there. The founder of the academy and the head of it is a man named George

Papadorus. The main center of study of the institute is around conflict and peace.

At the end of a particularly intense seminar, George Papadoros got up and said, “Are there any questions?” After some silence, Fulghum raised his hand and was called upon. He said, “Dr. Papadoros, what is the meaning of life?” I told that he is quirky. There were a few giggles and chuckles and some folks started to leave. Papadoros raised his hand and said, “I have an answer for you.”

People sat back down. He reached into his wallet and pulled out a small round mirror about the size of a quarter (like this one). He turned the mirror over in his fingers and began talking in a quite reflective voice. This is what he said.

“When I was a young child, during the war, we were very poor and we lived in a remote mountain village. One day, on the road, I found the broken pieces of a mirror. A German motorcycle had crashed in that place.

“I tried to find all the pieces of the mirror and put them together, but it was not possible. So, I kept the largest piece. This one. By scratching it on a stone, I made it round. I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light into dark places... where the sun would never shine- in deep holes and crevices. There are caves in Crete with surface fissures. I would shine light in

dark closets and behind walls. It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places I could find.

“I kept the little mirror, and as when about my growing up, I would take it out in idle moments and continue the challenge of the game. As I became a man, I grew to understand that this was not just child’s play, but a metaphor for what I might do with my life. I came to understand that I am not the light or the source of the light. But light- the light of truth, knowledge, and understanding- is there, and the light will only shine in the dark places if I reflect it.

“I am a fragment of a mirror whose would design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I have I can reflect light into the dark places of this world- into the dreary places and hearts of men- and to change somethings in some people. Perhaps others might see and do likewise. This is what I am about. This is the meaning of my life.”

Fulghum wrote that the group sat in stunned silence. Fulghum went on to say that he does not remember much from the seminars he attended that year, but will never forget that story. He also said that he has shared it many times since as its power is palpable.

Will the Deacons please come forward? In the collection plates, you will find small round mirrors. Please accept one as a gift from me.

I would like you to keep it as a reminder. I hope you find a way to keep it with you. I will also keep mine in my wallet. This is a reminder

that you are not the source of the light, but you have the opportunity and privilege of reflecting God's light into the darkness of other people's hearts.

This is what I try to do in my life- reflect the light of Christ to others. This certainly is the meaning of my life. I pray that it will be for you, too. Think about it. If each and every one of us leaves here with the goal of reflecting God's light into the darkness of someone's life this week, what we might start.

I need not point out that there is plenty of darkness out there. More than enough for all of us to reflect light into. Remember, we are not the light. Back to our Gospel quote from this morning. "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it." AMEN