

What We See in the Darkness

"In the beginning there was nothing. God said, 'Let there be light!' And there was light. There was still nothing, but you could see it a whole lot better."

Ellen DeGeneres

Light is sight. And as Ms. DeGeneres said, "It allows us to see a whole lot better." See what? Everything... including the darkness. So, it appears to me, right now, more than anything else, all of us need Light. We need Light to see ourselves, others, and God. We need Light to see Hope, Joy, and Love. And we need Light, most of all, to drive out the dark. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said,

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only Light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

Have you ever been to Alaska during the winter? It is dark, very dark. And it is dark for most of the day; up north, all of the day. About 34 years ago, I lived in the southern most community of Metlakatla, Alaska on Annette Island. I was a missionary serving a Native American population of around 1200 (240 people in my parish). During the summer, the sun came up about 1:00 AM and set at 11: PM. There was light and lots of it. During the winter, the sun poked its tiny head out just in time for lunch but ran away before finishing its peanut butter and jelly sandwich. There was darkness and lots of it. For less than 2 hours of dusk-like light, for almost 6 months, my two boys (2 & 4), my wife, and the rest of the residents of the island lived in the dark. And when I say dark, I mean the real *dark* dark, pitch black dark, "tar-on-the-roof-dark". If you stood on the beach on a moonless evening and gazed out into the Pacific Ocean, there appeared to be absolutely nothing. No lights from a nearby city. No lights from anywhere. The only thing you could see in the nothingness was the darkness.

Can you remember the last time you experienced such darkness? I'm not talking about some type of foggy darkness or "between the dreaming and waking up darkness". I am speaking of those times when, because of something or anything, you simply can't see any way out because your world has turned into a very dark place. Right now, our world has turned into a very dark place, a different place than it was just eight weeks ago. Our world is sick with a virus that kills. And we are all hurting.

When the power goes out in life, there is only one thing to do. Find a light. If light drives out the dark, and it does, then go get a light. Anton Chekhov, one of the greatest short story authors of all time, once wrote,

"Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass."

Ok. We're all going through a difficult time, an uncomfortable time, a scary time. We have no idea what the future holds. Worry, fear, and depression are real feelings. When you look into a mirror, you cannot even see yourself. The glass appears to be broken, much like so many lives in our world today. But as you drop your head in despair, look around on the floor. What do you see? The broken glass of your life? Sure you do. But look a little closer. Look *within* that brokenness. There is your light. It is a *reflection* of another light. Maybe it is a memory of another, more pleasant time, the voice of a faithful friend, the support of a caring group, a web site's wisdom, and words from the Word. Whatever or Whomever, grab it right away. That reflection is the way out, or at least for the time being, the way *to* the way out.

When I was twelve, I went to my very first Boy Scout Summer Camp. For two weeks, I had a blast. No parents, no ornery little brother, no grass to cut or chores to do. For a kid, it was Heaven on earth. Swimming, canoeing, fishing, and actually, pretty good food. Night at camp was a different story. Oh, I never was afraid of the dark. I just had a rough time negotiating with the darkness. I could never find anything in my back pack, my flashlight batteries seemed to always go out when I really needed them to stay on, or my flashlight just didn't work. One time I even lost my flashlight. I did not like the darkness. One dark, partly cloudy night with only a fingernail of a moon, I decided to join my Scoutmaster for a walk through the woods to the Canteen for a candy bar snack before bed. I grabbed my not so trustworthy flashlight and started down the windy, fern-laced forest path to paradise. Together, we walked the half mile or so with the light of our lights shining brightly before us. Then my Scoutmaster said something I will always remember, "Let's turn off our flashlights. We will be able to see better without any manufactured light." I couldn't believe the whole thing. How would we see the path? I thought he was an idiot but I turned off my light anyway, preparing, in my mind, to trip over a rock at any moment. What happened next really was amazing. My eyes became accustomed to the dark. The darkness did not consume or overtake me. And the darkness did not dictate the outcome of my night's hike. I could see not only the path, but the trees and leaves and underbrush of the forest. Where was the light coming from? Reflections from everything around me - other troops' campfires, a few stars, tiny specks of moonlight, the nearby lake, and the path itself. It was amazing! That night I learned an important lesson. Even when the darkness is really dark, like it is right now, there IS Light and hope and ALWAYS a Way out of the dark. And look where the Way comes from. When we put down and

stop focusing on the things of this world and pick up and focus upon God's world, we see there is one WAY, one TRUTH, and one LIFE. God provides the way out.

Now it is time to do just that. Turn off and put away all manufactured lights – those things we *think* we need to make us happy. Most of our “flashlights” have been taken away from us anyway. Look at all the tiny specks of Light...friends, family, neighbors, even strangers. See the Light of God's Love shining brightly in our fellow human beings. The magnificent Light is all around us and in us and through us.

“The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.” John 1:5

It is the darkness that you and I and the world find ourselves at this time; not the nothingness. If you think that your life is worth nothing, you are wrong. Our lives are worth **everything**; precious beyond words and worth. Our lives are worth fighting for every minute of every waking moment. And, believe it or not, the darkness can help us. Rabbi Yehuda Berg once wrote in his best-selling book, The 72 Names of God,

“Darkness is the only path to light. It is not our wonderful gifts that make us closer to God: it's using our garbage to transform ourselves. This is the key that unlocks the door that opens to God.”

With love and lots of Light,

Pastor Dave Pieplow

“You Raise Me Up”

*“When I am down and, oh my soul, so weary,
When troubles come and my heart burdened be;
Then I am still and wait here in the silence,
Until you come and sit awhile with me.*

*You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains;
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas;
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders;
You raise me up...To more than I can be”*
*“There is no life – no life without its hunger;
Each restless heart beats so imperfectly;
But when you come and I am filled with wonder,
Sometimes, I think I glimpse eternity.*

*You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains;
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas;
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders;
You raise me up...To more than I can be.”*