

“Living Light”

Steve Godfrey said, “The investors among us know that it’s helpful to complete reviews of our portfolios periodically. Which holdings are doing well? Which are doing poorly? Does the strategy still make sense?” Referring to our Scripture, Godfrey continued, **“This passage is an invitation to complete a portfolio review on our very lives.”** (“Portfolio Review” by Steve Godfrey posted on churchintheworld.com)

Today, we are going to do a review of the portfolio of our lives by examining two different ways of thinking about this sermon’s title, **“Living Light”**. This “Busy” Worship Series works to help us **lighten the load of expectations and “shoulds”** as one way to lighten up, as well as, to **literally lighten the clutter that crowds out our serenity**. Another “living light” is related to lightening expectations, shoulds, and clutter. The second meaning of the “living light” title is about living in accordance with the **“Light” of God** – following the Revelation of God’s Truth and Example shown through the Divine Parent’s Agape Love, Forgiveness, Invitation, and Welcome manifested in God’s Son, Jesus the Christ.

Let’s look first at that second way of fulfilling the sermon title – living in accordance with God’s Light. Our “The Message” version of the Scripture for today helps us to see what Jesus was saying and doing in new ways. **It reported Jesus explaining, “What I’m trying to do here is get you to relax, not be so preoccupied with getting so you can respond to God’s giving.”** God’s Light includes recognizing – “getting” that being selfish and self-centered is self-defeating. Jesus sought to get his audience – that includes us – “to relax” – be freed from the bondage of chasing after the world’s false gods – wealth, things, power, control, pleasure, desire, and violence. Jesus wants to provide us that liberation, so we are able to receive, respond, and live in response to God’s Gifts to us!

Jesus continued, **“People who don’t know God and the way He works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how He works. Steep yourself in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions.”** Speaking to his followers, Jesus was pointing to his own life and words as the primary source for our knowing God and the way our Divine Parent works. Those who don’t know God and the Almighty’s Example are very anxious – fuss over their things because they are not liberated by God’s Light – God’s Reality, God’s Initiative, and God’s Provisions. We “steep” ourselves in God’s Light as we are focused on the ultimate revelation of God’s Agape – Suffering and Self-Giving Love for us through God’s Own Son, Jesus Christ!

I am hoping some of us recall this “Light” terminology is especially found, in the Gospel of John. Remember, John 1 referred to Jesus, the Son of God, being the Word – the way through which all things were created, and then, went on to report in **verses 4-5, “The Word was the source of Life, and this Life brought Light to humankind. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out.”** Then, the Gospel of John stated in **verse 9, Jesus “was the Real Light – the Light that comes into the world and shines on all humanity.”** “Living Light” is possible for each of us and for all people, if we are open to comprehend and to follow Jesus’ teachings and example of how to relate and live with God and with everyone else – God’s Light! Being free of our bondage to all the baggage the world wants to thrust upon us is crucial to our being open to God’s Light.

Keeping all of that in mind, let us move on to consider how “Living Light” moves us to take action to lighten up in our daily lives. **This Worship Series emphasizes the truth that many of us live with the tyranny of measuring-up that keeps us weighed down.** How do we create space to flourish in the ways God intends? How can we “minimalize” our possessions so that they do not possess us – so we are not made prisoners of the false gods pushed upon us by Society? The Message version of today’s Reading provided us some important insights. **Jesus continued, “You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Don’t be afraid of missing out. You’re my dearest friends! The Father wants to give you the very Kingdom itself.”** In the midst of Jesus’ message about his being the revelation of God’s Agape Love, Forgiveness, Invitation, and Welcome for all people, he made the point that God is looking out for us! The Divine Parent is constantly seeking to give us God’s Kingdom – to make us citizens of God’s Realm both now and when it is fulfilled.

Toward the conclusion of our Scripture, **Jesus tells us some important information about how citizens of God’s Kingdom live, when he said, “Be generous. Give to the poor. ... The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.”** William Loader reminds us, “The reality is that we need to address the underlying possessive anxieties which our world has a way of escalating. When we do so, then we can be free to

let our wealth go and use it (as wisely as our best caring strategies determine). This is both something which grace generates and something where the sequence is not automatic. Grace needs a shove because the sophisticated rationalisations for selfishness create heavy drag.” (“Pentecost 12” posted at staff.murdoch.edu.au by William Loader)

Among the resources for this Worship Series is a group of sermons by Rev. Eric Elnes, Ph.D. In his sermon for this Sunday, Elnes wrote about the reasons why some people choose to not live in the Light – to not be free from the burdens of our chase for things. Among those reasons were:

► **First, “Some of us choose not to be ‘rich toward God’ because what God wants is of no concern to us.”** He elaborated, “We figure that God set up the world long ago and left us to pretty much run the place. We believe that whatever we have is ours, and it came to us with no little or no help from God. So aside from casting a few coins in the church coffers now and again when we’re absolutely sure we have no need of the money, we consider our obligation to God to be fulfilled.”

► **Second, “Others of us choose not to be ‘rich toward God’ because we value the esteem of our community more than God’s esteem.”**

► **Third, “Still others of us fail to be ‘rich toward God’ not because we don’t care, or we want to keep up with the Joneses, but because we don’t have more than a vague notion of what it means to be ‘rich toward God’ in the first place.”** He asked, “What does it mean to be ‘rich toward God,’ anyway?” One response I would give is that it is important for us to slow down and take time to be with our Unhurried God in Worship and daily in our Prayers, so we are open to receive riches – blessings – the Kingdom from God!

► I would add a **Fourth Reason many choose to not be “rich toward God”. It is because the temptation to be trapped in the cycle of consumption, hoarding, and being controlled by pleasure, wealth, and other things has enslaved them.**

In case you are worried that the cost is too great to be someone, who is “Living Light” – following God’s Light as a citizen of God’s Kingdom – being “rich toward God”, Elnes assured, “No, Jesus isn’t advising us to hand over our savings and retirement money for an ultimate retirement nest egg in heaven.” **“In fact, he’s really not talking so much about what we can give to God so much as what God can give to us.”** Elnes concluded, “But we enjoyed the money a lot more by using it to work on our connection to an ‘unhurried God’ and on our unhurried connection to each other. The fact of the matter is that love can never be taken away from you, whereas everything else can be. Love can’t even be taken away when it exists only in memory, as anyone who has ever lost someone special can attest to.”

Remember, Godfrey encouraged us to have a portfolio review of our lives at the beginning of this message. He went on to ask, “What possessions could I sell to enjoy greater simplicity while also being a tangible blessing to someone else?” **“Is my portfolio more focused on the here and now or the there and then?”** Godfrey asked, “If we really believed we are being given God’s kingdom how might we live differently?” (“Portfolio Review” by Steve Godfrey posted on churchintheworld.com)

In answer to Godfrey’s last question, he shared how his wife and he took the leap of faith by leaving their business to serve a church in Russia for a time. That reminded me of how 35 years ago tomorrow, I started my ministry as the Pastor of Round Grove United Church. Now, it was certainly not as risky as moving to Russia to serve as the Pastor of a church there. Nevertheless, Margaret, five-year-old Jennifer, and I took a leap of faith, so we could minister to this congregation. We were barely able to buy a house in Lewisville with a high interest rate. Margaret had to build her Piano Studio from scratch. Jennifer was about to begin going to public school. And, the congregation had no history of affording a fulltime Pastor as it averaged 25 persons in attendance in the Historic Original Building on the other side of the then 2 lane highway. **Yet, both the congregation and my family shared the vision for a renewed ministry and trusted in God’s Calling and Promise!** Our Divine Parent is Faithful and we have all been blessed, as well as, we have become a powerful expression of “Living Light”! **Let us continue to Live Light and to be a light – God’s agents, who invite and welcome a rich diversity of people into reconnecting with our Unhurried God! Amen.**