

The Light Of The World
Luke 9:28-43a; Matthew 5:14-16
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The First U.P. Church of Crafton Heights
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Maybe you remember the Beatles song “A Day In The Life”. It begins, “I read the news today, oh boy...” Have you read the news this week? It is depressing and distressing. The world is a mess.

Did you read the news about the 10 year old boy in Washington, PA, who had been locked in a feces-filled animal crate by his grandmother? Why would he be living with his grandmother? His mother has abandoned him and his father is recently escaped from a federal prison. Before his grandmother locked him in the cage, his uncle beat him. Why would they “punish” an elementary school child so severely? Because he has been poisoning their beverages with petroleum and household chemicals. Why did he do that? Because he was angry that they went away on a family and left him – a 10 year old - home alone. The world is a mess.

Did you read the news about Jolisa Barber? She was a student in Mollie’s kindergarten class and an active participant in Saleem’s youth groups at the Pittsburgh Project. This twelve year old honor student walked with her mother to her sister’s house, where she died in a fusillade of more than 40 gunshots from assault weapons. One of the attackers who sprayed the home with gunfire was a 15 year old boy eager to prove himself in the world of gang warfare. The world is messed up.

We have a student in our pre-school who has been absent for several weeks. She has brain cancer. There is a woman that you know who is regularly beaten by a man that she loves. This part of the world is filled with people that you know and love who are regularly betrayed by their parents, abused or neglected by their children, manipulated by their friends, worn down by unjust situations at work, choked by racism, or driven to despair by poverty. The world is messed up. I heard the news today, oh boy...

Last week – just seven short days ago – I hobbled up here and gave you what I said was good news. We heard the scripture from Genesis 1 and from John 1, and I was brash enough to suggest that the world in which we live is a God-blessed space and the time in which we live is God-ordered time. Some of you – not many, but some – were here. Do you remember that? I made it sound pretty good, didn’t I?

So what the heck is wrong? There seems to be a clear disconnect between all that wonderful great news of a week ago and the pages of the *Post-Gazette* this week. Something is wrong, is it not? Something is very wrong. The world is messed up.

Can I tell you that I love – I mean to say, I LOVE the passage that Steve read for us a few moments ago. I have been your pastor for 14 years. I would suggest that for at

least 10 of the last 14 years, someone has stood up here early in February and read this text to you. It is a formative, shaping text. I like it. You like it.

Can you picture it? There you are, up on the mountain – away from the crowds, the home, the job, the family. Just you, Jesus, and a couple of good friends. And miracles are happening. I can do more than picture it. I've been there. I was there, sitting by the campfire at Friendship Village Campground after DC2000. I was there, watching with you in the hospital room when your child – the one that the doctors said was impossible to conceive – was born. I was with you at the Domasi Mission Station in the summer of 2003 when the power went out and we were overwhelmed by the vastness of our God. I've been there! You've been there, too, haven't you? You've been on that mountain where it's right, and God's hand is easy to see and God's voice is easy to hear. It's right. It's good. And you want it to last.

It's no wonder that Peter tries to make it last as long as possible. Did you catch that part in verse 33? "As the men were parting from him..." That's when Peter says, "Look, guys, let's get comfortable. There's no hurry. In fact, I'll set up the tents. Let's just stay here for a -"

But before he can even finish his thought, he's interrupted by a voice from heaven (don't you hate it when God interrupts you?), that says, "This is my Son, my Chosen – listen to him!"

And then they looked around and they were all alone. No Moses, no Elijah, no shining Jesus' face, no voice from heaven. Luke says, "they told no one anything of what they had seen..." Yeah, no kidding they told no one. Who's going to believe *that*?

But listen – listen to what happens next – Luke 9:37-43, p. 66 in your pew bibles:

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. And behold, a man from the crowd cried, "Teacher, I beg you to look upon my son, for he is my only child; and behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out; it convulses him till he foams, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here."

While he was coming, the demon tore him and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astonished at the majesty of God.

Goodbye, mountain top; hello, real world. Do you see what happened? The transfiguration, in all of its glory and serenity and wonder, led to a messy encounter with the real world.

You know, I think, that that's not an accident. That's how God works.

Last week, I said that the light from above is an indication of God's blessing in this time and in this place. That's true. I meant it.

But did you hear what Kiayla read? Jesus (the one of whom God said, "Listen to him!"), says, "YOU are the light of the world. Let YOUR light shine!"

Beloved, here's the deal: You, right now, sitting where you sit, being who you are, you know something of God's blessing and God's love. You were all nodding when I was talking about those mountain top experiences. Why? Because you've been there. You said you were there. Heck, I've seen most of you there.

How is the world supposed to know anything of God's blessing and God's love? How are the people connected with those news stories I mentioned supposed to know? How do our neighbors who are caught up in desperate situations supposed to know of God's power, God's love, God's blessing?

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

You have heard those words before. You might know that they are the backbone of our SHINE capital campaign. I want you to think about those words today when you wander over to the Christian Education building and see the new energy-efficient lights that have been installed. I want you to think about them next week when the new windows are mounted.

But don't you for one second think that the goal of the SHINE campaign is to bring new lights, new windows, or new wheelchair ramps into this old building.

If we do anything right in this SHINE campaign, it will help us to live more fully into the truth of Matthew 5. The goal of the SHINE campaign is to give you a place to stand when you are being God's light in the lives of your neighbors. We're not trying to make this a great building. We're trying to equip you to be an obedient church.

Here is the truth: The world is messed up. It is a needy, seedy, weedy, place, where despicable things happen with unsettling regularity.

And here is the truth: God is a great God, who works wonders in the lives of His people.

And here is the truth: as children of that great God, and followers of His son, Jesus, you and I are privileged to be agents of hope and reconciliation and healing in the world. It is, as you know, not an easy road. It is difficult and exacting and tiring and we

are tempted to be discouraged. But it is the only way that God has put before us, the only choice that we have: be light. Shine.

This week, I want you to come back to church in the darkness. I want you to join me in worship on Ash Wednesday. Immerse yourself in Lent. Equip yourself by receiving the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Ready yourself, so that you can Shine.

Don't come to worship this Lent because you need things to get you out of the house or the dorm on Wednesday nights or Sunday mornings. Don't come because you need to rack up some special "holiness" points in order to feel good about yourself. Don't come because you'll feel guilty if you don't come.

Come to worship this Lent because wounded, broken, weary people are stumbling around in the darkness of the world and you have – no, you *are* – the light of the world.

So shine.

Amen.