

ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

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Scripture: Is. 50:10-11

“Overcoming the Darkness” (part 2)

A BLESSED MOTHER’S DAY!

I would like to especially welcome all our mothers this morning. We thank you for your love and support. Motherhood is truly a gift from the Lord. It is a wonderful privilege and it reflects in particular one of the most important attributes of our God – His unconditional love. True mothers demonstrate unconditional love for their children time and time again. My sermon this morning will not have motherhood as its theme, as has usually been the case in years past. Rather we are continuing the series “Overcoming the Darkness.” And yet, as we talk about what is required to overcome the darkness in this world, we can’t help but also know that a mother’s love plays an important role.

DARK DAYS WILL COME

Now last week we talked about how there will be times of darkness in our lives. Times when bad things happen and there is seemingly no explanation. Times when we simply don’t understand why? Last week, I mentioned the nine year old girl in my wife’s second grade class who just lost her mom to cancer.

When we hear of such tragedies it is only normal to ask why? And in our own parish family we’ve had members face similar challenges – whether it again be battling cancer, losing a job or savings, a wayward son or daughter, a unfaithful spouse, the loss of a baby and the list goes on.

This past week I went to Washington DC with my son on his class field trip. One of the last places we visited was the Holocaust Museum. There we saw how the persecution of the Jews took root in Nazi Germany and spread throughout Europe. The exhibits were moving and disturbing at the same time. General Eisenhower said that he went to the concentration camps and had them filmed so that later generations could not say such things never happened. Of course, the natural response to such things is to ask, “Why?” The next day on our trip we went to Gettysburg, to see the place where the bloodiest battle in US history took place – 10,000 Americans killed, 40,000 wounded. Again, I found myself asking the question, Why?

It is are human response and we should ask that question, but the more important question is how? How will we respond? Everyone asks why? And ultimately God only knows the answer, but not everyone asks how? How will we respond the way God wants us to respond when the lights go out?

And last week, we looked at a passage that tells how to respond in such times? **Is. 50:10** ***“Who is among you that fears the LORD, that obeys the voice of His servant, that walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.”***

There will be times of darkness for the believer and unbeliever alike. Now we need to understand that darkness is used as a metaphor for life without God and for evil. But there will be times when God allows us to go through darkness. And while such things are a result of the curse of sin and fall of man, the believer is not immune from them. The problem is in this life is that while we are all guilty of sin and will all die not everyone suffers fairly do they? Some are given more some are given less. And

sometimes as we found last week, those of deepest devotion experience the deepest darkness; that dark night of the soul when it seems as though God has forsaken us. The truth is however, God never forsakes us but rather is concerned with bringing us through the darkness so that we might grow in faith and character and accomplish good out of it.

LOOK TO THE LORD

Remember last week when I asked the question, When have you grown the most spiritually? When everything is going well? When all is sunlight and roses? Or when there was darkness and difficulty and uncertainty? Are those not the times when you have grown the most? Someone has said, “*Faith is like film, is developed in the darkness.*” Recall what Isaiah says? **Is. 50:10:** “***Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.***”

In other words, “Look to the Lord.” When all is crashing in around you, when you can’t see clearly, when nothing seems to make sense, look to the Lord, don’t look to your feelings, or the world or your circumstances but look to the Lord. And when we look to the Lord, it means looking to His example and looking to His Word.

LEAN ON THE LORD

But not only are we to look to the Lord, we are to lean on the Lord. Isaiah says let him, “***Rely on his God.***” The English word, “rely” is from same root as the word “staff” in **Psalm 23**. “Thy rod and thy staff – they comfort me.”

Now, what was a staff? A staff was something that the shepherd leaned on for support. It is something to lean on to give you comfort in a dark valley. So when the Word says “let him rely on his God” what it literally means is let him lean upon that God for support. And recall we saw how God is not in the business of giving us reasons, He is in the business of giving us Himself. And specifically, it is the Holy Spirit. Life is not about getting a reason, it’s about getting a relationship. God wants to bring us to Himself, and they’re times when He will take all away so that we lean on Him and see what is really important.

And I believe there's something about the darkness that sharpens our spiritual eyesight. I heard of an artist who painted a painting, a very beautiful painting. He called a friend over to see his painting. When the friend came over, he took his friend, and put him in a room, shut the door, pulled down the blinds and had him sit in darkness for fifteen minutes. Then he said, “Come, I want you to see my painting.” His friend replied, “Why did you have me to sit in the darkness for a quarter of an hour?” He said, “Because you had too much of the glare of the street in your eyes. Had you seen my painting with the street’s glare in your eyes you would not have been able to appreciate the subtlety of all it's colors.”

I wonder if we don’t sometimes get all dazzled by the glitz and glare of this world, its brightness and beauty, that sometimes God just let's us sit in darkness so when the light comes again we can appreciate the incredible colors of God's grace.

LEAVE IT WITH THE LORD

Now there is something else I want you to see. Look now at **Is. 50:11:** “***Behold, all you who kindle a fire, who encircle yourselves with firebrands, walk in the light of your fire and among the***

brands you have set ablaze. This you will have from My hand; And you lie down in torment (or sorrow).”

After giving us two positive commands, Isaiah now tells not to do something. He is saying don't stand in manmade light. Don't light your own fire! One of the great dangers of being in the darkness is that you may be tempted to light your own fire. Remember if darkness comes to you and you are fearing God and obeying God then that means that the darkness has been ordained of God.

Now don't think that darkness can chase away light. If you are in a lighted room you can't open the door and let in the dark. The light always chases away the darkness. The only way darkness can come is if the light is removed. So if the light has been removed that means God in his sovereignty has allowed the darkness. That means there is a reason for the darkness. And if God has done that, don't be so foolish to light your own fire.

Instead, leave it with the Lord. Don't light your own fire. If you light your own fire, what does Isaiah say will happen? You're going to lie down in sorrow. You see what happens to a lot of people is that they find themselves in darkness and when they find themselves in darkness, their motto is well let's do something even if it's wrong. And so, they launch out in the strength and the energy of the flesh. They don't leave it with the Lord, but they take matters into their own hands and they do things in the flesh rather than by the Spirit. They act in ways that God has not told them to act and since they don't have the direction or the power of the Spirit they blow it. They light their own fire.

Let me give you a few examples from the Bible. Remember Abraham? Abraham was a friend of God, a man of faith. He loved God, he feared and obeyed God. God gave Abraham a promise and God said to Abraham, I'm going to make a covenant with you and I'm going to bless the whole world through your descendants. I'm going to give you a son while you're an old man. And Abraham was in the light when God gave him that promise. And then God himself put Abraham in darkness. That is, God didn't seem to be in any hurry about it. Abraham couldn't understand. Both he and his wife wondered why doesn't God do something? As a result, Abraham was plunged into darkness and into despair. But that darkness and despair was of God because God was testing Abraham. God was working on His own timetable. Would Abraham trust? Would He wait on the Lord, would He leave it with the Lord? He didn't, did he? Instead, he decided to take things into his own hands and when Sarah encourages him to have sexual relations with Hagar, her maidservant, Abraham does so and produces a son through her, Ishmael. And there has been sorrow between the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael ever since till this day in fact. Why? Because Abraham went and lit his own fire. Rather than waiting on God he lit his own fire and as a result, for a time, made himself to lie down in sorrow. He could not trust God, he could not wait on God, he could not look to the Lord and lean on the Lord and leave it with the Lord.

Or how about Moses? God said to Moses, “Moses, I want you deliver my people from the land of bondage, from the land of Egypt.” You are going to be my commander in chief and you're going to obey me. But then Moses got a little anxious about it. He couldn't understand why God was so slow to set his people free and when he saw one of the Egyptians mistreating a fellow Israelite, Moses took matters into his own hands. He lit his own fire. He killed that Egyptian and as a result, had to flee Egypt for his life. Moses, who was meant to be a missionary ended up a murderer, and spent forty years in a back side of the desert, every night lying down in sorrow because he couldn't leave things with God, because He couldn't leave it with the Lord. He lit his own fire

You can read the same thing about the Apostle Peter when he was in the garden of Gethsemane with Jesus. Jesus had told Peter that He was going to the cross, that He was going to suffer, that He was

going to bleed and die and be buried and rise again on the third day. In fact, He had told all His disciples this, but when the authorities come to arrest Jesus, Peter didn't understand. He draws his sword and cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant, Malchus. Jesus rebuked Peter and told him to put back his sword in its sheath. Why? Peter was lighting his own fire. You see when the darkness comes, don't light your own fire, but let God's light overcome the darkness! Wait on God, He'll answer you. Not only is He necessary, He's enough. And you will come out of the darkness and you'll come out a better person.

For if there is one truth that the Bible proclaims time and time again, it is this: If your sun has set, it will rise again. **Psalm 30:5** declares, “*Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.*” The same sun that sets is the same sun that rises again and God will indeed lighten the paths of his saints. One of these days, our God, our Lord Jesus Christ, will once and for all overcome the darkness and flood our world with His glory and His light!

One day we'll know the meaning of our tears and someday we'll understand. Like I said last week, just because it doesn't make sense, doesn't mean it doesn't make sense. And just because it doesn't make sense to you now doesn't mean it will not make sense to you someday. God has spoken and He has told us to always to trust in Him, to rely on Him and not to light our own fire. How do we overcome the darkness? Look to the Lord, lean on the Lord and leave it with the Lord! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!