

Sermon – The Light is Still On

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UCCat The Villages, FL
November 25th, 2012

As Doug shared with us from Psalm 43: “Send out your light and your truth! Let them lead me!” Friends let us pray: Heavenly Father, you are the light, the truth, and the way. Allow us to follow that wonderful light which you have provided us for our path in life. Amen.

Some of you may be wondering what takes place in a locker room, when it's halftime of a sporting event. Halftime locker room sessions are divided into two parts. The first part the coaches go over the plays that worked and the ones that didn't work, and what adjustments can be made to correct those plays. The second part of halftime is devoted to motivational speeches in order to inspire the players. There are many famous halftime speeches such as “win one for the Gipper,” which was made by Knute Rockne as he addressed his Notre Dame team against Army in 1928. Coaches are telling their teams that there is still time to win, to complete their task, to reach their goal. They are telling them the light is still on.

Some of you have read the book “90 Minutes in Heaven,” by Don Piper. Some of you also had the pleasure of hearing him speak here in The Villages. Don Piper is a Baptist Minister, who was involved in a horrific car accident in 1989. On the way home from a conference, Don Piper's car was crushed by a semi that crossed into his lane. Medical personnel said he died instantly. While his body lay lifeless inside the ruins of his car, Piper experienced the glories of heaven, awed by its beauty and music. Ninety minutes after the wreck, while a minister prayed for him, Piper miraculously returned to life on earth with only the memory of inexpressible heavenly bliss. At the end of his book he found purpose in his ordeal. He began visiting and comforting others who were involved in traumatic auto accidents and needed someone to relate to. He said “I found purpose again in being above. I am serving my purpose here on earth.” Don Piper knows the light is still on.

Just last year Dr. Mary C. Neal, an Orthopedic surgeon, published a book called "To Heaven and Back." Dr. Neal recalls her experience when in 1999 she drowned in a kayak accident. While cascading down a waterfall, her kayak became pinned at the bottom and she was immediately and completely submerged. Despite the rescue efforts of her companions, Mary was underwater for too long, and as a result she died. In her book Dr. Neal describes her experiences in heaven and then she was eventually revived. She truly believes that God returned her to earth to save her oldest son from a potential tragedy in his life, and also to protect her family. She felt her life on earth was not complete, that she needed more saving to do. The light was still on for her.

Both of these novels are available for your reading pleasure in our library. Both Dr. Neal and Pastor Don Piper believe that they were sent back to earth by God to save, help, and make a difference in the lives of others, as their purpose on earth was not finished yet. The light was still on.

How similar are these stories, but not as historic, as what happen to Jesus over 2000 years ago. Jesus was put to death and then rose again to save our souls. His job on earth was not yet complete. The light was still on.

So where do you and I fit into these set of circumstances? How can we relate our lives to these stories? Our whole life, our whole being is to find purpose in life and to be good Christians while the light is still on. You will get your locker room speech from me soon.

There are many holidays and events that we celebrate every year. Some of them are; Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years, and March Madness. March madness is the name given to the college basketball tournament in March, which eventually crowns the number one college basketball team in the country. When living up north this always helped to alleviate some of the "cabin fever" of the long winters, with our office pools and brackets. There have been many exciting games and upsets that come to mind, and who can forget 1983 when Jim Valvano's North Carolina State team scored a huge upset beating the University of Houston, and coach Valvano running up and down the court looking for someone to hug! What a game that was. Coach Valvano gave a great

halftime speech that day, telling his team that even though they were up against a powerful team, there was still time to complete their task. The light was still on for them. Jimmy V, as he was known, became a motivational speaker. He was diagnosed with bone cancer in June 1992 and not given much time to live. He created the V Foundation for Cancer Research, an organization dedicated to finding a cure for cancer. He announced that the foundation's motto would be "Don't give up.....don't ever give up." The tie I'm wearing today is a Jimmy V tie reminding people to never give up. The light is still on. Before his death in 1993 Jimmy V spoke at the ESPY Awards, presented by ESPN. He suggested there were three things we should do every day. Number one is laugh, laugh every day. Number two is think, spend some time in thought. Number three is having your emotions moved to tears, even happy tears. You should laugh, think, and cry every day. My friends, the light is still on for us to do these things.

Every Sunday we light candles on the alter and candles traditionally have been used in churches of all denominations because of their symbolic meaning of light. Their beauty and warmth is a reminder of the love of God. The candle's light provides guidance in the darkness. This is symbolic of the truth of the word of God as it provides a light and a lamp to guide the path of the believer. The lit candle can illuminate for the believer, the path of life.

Many of you, I'm sure, remember our old Sunday School song; this little candle light of mine, I'm going to let it shine. Don't hide it under a bush, and don't let anyone blow it out. Let it shine all the time. Let it shine. Dr. Neal, in her book, wrote; "Truly God does not give us a lamp so we can hide it under a basket or a bed. He gives each of us a lamp so we may give light to the world." In our Old testament reading of Psalms it was written, "Send out your light and your truth! Let them lead me."

This past May as we drove south over the Morse Bridge there was a beautiful sight of light. To the right the sun was setting and people were in awe of the glorious sunset. To the left was the spectacle of the moon and that particular evening in May the moon was as close as it would be to the earth in

the next 100 years. Possibly you remember that evening. People were stationed with their cameras and tripods to capture the event. I crossed over the bridge taking in the beauty of light on both sides of the bridge. God was telling us the light is still on.

In 2004 the United Church of Christ formally launched the “God is Still Speaking” campaign. Our comma is a symbol of that campaign and our beliefs of “never placing a period where God has placed a comma.” The comma means the light is still on my friends.

Okay, now time for your locker room speech. Now I’m not going to pretend that anyone of us is at halftime of our lives, maybe third or fourth quarter. I hope none of us are in overtime! I ran into a friend of mine in the Villages from the Western New York area who is in his 80s and he told me he always wanted to live to be 80 and when he turned 80 he renegotiated his contract with God. So every Sunday before the alter candles are extinguished we light the wick on our candle lighter and carry it back down the aisle symbolizing that we are to carry our light of truth and love into our everyday lives. Dr Neal says God gives each of us a lamp so we can give light to the world. Psalms says send out your light and your truth. Jimmy V says laugh, think, and cry every day. Jesus says I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. So I say to you; Be a good Christian. Be good to people and take care of your fellow man no matter who they are or their beliefs or where they are on life’s journey, be kind and courteous to people you meet in the neighborhood or in stores, or in the roundabouts; be a good person while the light is still on.

When I was growing up, the youngest of three boys, I came from a wonderful, loving, and close-knit middle class family. Vacations, holidays, and attending church were wonderful. And there was a lot of love in my family but oddly enough in those days we rarely said “I love you” to each other. The love was truly there, we just didn’t outwardly express it to each other and I wish we had said it more.

I would like everyone to join me in a small exercise. I'm going to ask Tom to lower the house lights and I'll ask everyone now to please join me in closing your eyes. Try to picture someone who has passed. Someone you wished you had said the words "I Love You" one more time. Now, picture that person is right in front of you. Take a moment now and smile at that person to let them know that you love them. Now open your eyes and have the lights go on. The light is still on. If you came with someone today squeeze their hand, give them a smile to let them know that you love them, because the light is still on. And whether you came with someone or alone today, let's all go home and call someone special in our lives and tell them that we love them, because we can do this, because the light is still on.

Here is a quote from a writer who is anonymous, "This is the beginning of a new day. God has given me this day to use as I will. I can waste it or grow in its light and be of service to others." My friends, the light is still on.

Amen

Psalm 43 expresses the longing of the troubled soul and appealing for God's help.

Psalm 43:2-4

New King James Version (NKJV)

2 For You are the God of my strength;

Why do You cast me off?

Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

3 Oh, send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me;

Let them bring me to Your holy hill And to Your tabernacle.

4 Then I will go to the altar of God, To God my exceeding joy;

And on the harp I will praise You, O God, my God.

In the open chapters of John, John writes about many of the teachings of Jesus, which makes the Pharisees uncomfortable.

John 8:1-12

New King James Version (NKJV)

8 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

² Now early^[a] in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. ³ Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, ⁴ they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman was caught^[b] in adultery, in the very act. ⁵ Now Moses, in the law, commanded^[c] us that such should be stoned.^[d] But what do You say?”^[e] ⁶ This they said, testing Him, that they might have *something* of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with *His* finger, as though He did not hear.^[f]

⁷ So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up^[g] and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” ⁸ And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ Then those who heard *it*, being convicted by *their* conscience,^[h] went out one by one, beginning with the oldest *even* to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. ¹⁰ When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her,^[i] “Woman, where are those accusers of yours?^[j] Has no one condemned you?”

¹¹ She said, “No one, Lord.”

And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and^[k] sin no more.”

¹² Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”