

Keep The Flame Alive

Introduction:

We're here to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the planting of a new church in the town of Stayner, Ontario. On September 1, 1985, a small group of 13 people gathered together for the launch service in what was then the Orange Hall, over by Byng Public School. If you were in that service 25 years ago would you stand?

Just a little over two years later, the first phase of this building was completed, as a testimony that this enterprise was here to stay. About seven years later this sanctuary was added. Another seven years later, in 2001, this assembly gave birth to Lighthouse Christian Assembly in Wasaga Beach, our first daughter church. And here we are, making plans for a brand new campus in the coming years.

Look around, Pastor Kevin, and see what God has done. Before we go any further today I wanted to stop and say thank you, first to God. This is His enterprise. As Revelation 3:7 says, "*What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.*" I also want to thank you, the founding pastor of this church, and your family, for the sacrifices you have made in order for us to be able to have this celebration today. Only God knows the hard work, sleepless nights and sacrifices made in your eleven years here.

I also want to thank all of those who have been a part of the church through its history, but who may have relocated or are serving in other congregations. I want to thank you for your hard work, for your willingness to pay a price to advance God's Kingdom here. Finally, I want to thank each of you who currently make up Clearview Community Church. You are my family, and I love you with all of my heart. I cannot tell you how much I look forward to what God has in store. I firmly believe that, as much as God has already accomplished, the best days of the church still lie ahead of us.

Within the history of this church we see reflected the typical pattern in which God chooses to work. He plants a seed in someone's heart through a whisper or a word, in this case a Pastor from Bide Arm, Newfoundland. When they act on the invitation to willingly partner with Him, He faithfully leads the way. So this is not so much our story, but God living His story through us.

Past

As I was preparing for this morning I asked Pastor Kevin if he had the message from that very first service 25 years ago. He couldn't find it, but Ann did – thanks Ann. I wanted to touch on that this morning, because those principles that were laid down became the foundation upon which this church was built.

The theme of the first service was unity. It was explained that the only way the church would succeed was if they were united in prayer, united in serving the community, and united in the work of God. I'm thankful that one thing this church is known for is that very thing.

There was also an evening service that first Sunday, and Pastor Kevin shared about the church's role as ambassadors for God's Kingdom in this world. I'd like to pick up from there. I want to talk this morning about what the church was intended to be.

When Jesus established His church He came to began a community of people who were restored in relationship - first to God, and then to the people around them. We've seen how that was lived out so powerfully in the lives of the first Christians, and how the church grew so dramatically because of it.

We've also seen how man-made rules and systems have often corrupted what God had intended to be good. Many of you here today have experienced church when it is far from what it should have been. Some of you stayed away from church for a time because of it. But, in spite of all of its failings, I've come to believe that church is worth it. As Bill Hybels said: *“The local church is the hope of the world because it stewards the only message that can impact a person's eternal destiny.”*

So this morning I want to talk about you. It's easy to talk about the church and what the church does corporately because we can always speak in general terms about what “it” does or what “they” do. But in 1 Corinthians 12:27 Paul tells us: *“Now you are the body of Christ, and*

each one of you is a part of it.” He moves from the general “you are” to the specific “each one of you.”

That’s what I want to talk about today - the each one of you - the power of one person to make a difference. It was Helen Keller who said “*the world is moved not only by the mighty shoves of the heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.*”

Hear what the Apostle Paul told the people in the church at Philippi: “*Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.*” - Philippians 2:14-16

He was writing to them from a prison. His ministry was nearing its end. He had blazed a trail throughout the Roman Empire, lighting fires of faith everywhere he went. Now he was writing to tell them to live their lives in such a way that the light would not be compromised. So what was this light that he talked about, and that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 6?

In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, he writes about an event that changed the world. The Creator of heaven and earth, God the Son, took on flesh and bone and came to earth as a human being. John describes him this way in verses 4-5: “*In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*”

It was this coming that changed everything. Jesus came into a world wracked by sin and violence, selfishness, anger and hate, and lived a perfect life. He showed that, regardless of your situation, love changes things. In His ultimate demonstration of that, He laid down His life on a cross so that each of us could be brought back into relationship with God. After His resurrection and ascension He sent His Spirit to live in us so that our lives also could be transformed. That light that is talked about in John, lives in every true Christ-follower.

“...God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

- Colossians 1:27

So the secret of the Christian life is very simple - it's Christ in us. He comes and takes up residence in us by His Spirit. If there is a light that shines in us at all, He is the light that shines. Mother Teresa stated it like this: *“The wire is you and me; the current is God. We have the power to let the current pass through us, use us, and produce the light of the world - Jesus.”*

It's actually very difficult to describe light. I looked for some help with this from on-line sources - but they only confused me. Perhaps the best way to describe it is by way of contrast.

Light vs. Darkness

We first of all would contrast light with darkness. Darkness hides things. More crimes are committed at night because it's easier to conceal movements. In fact, we find it remarkable when someone commits a crime in “broad daylight” for just that reason. People like to hide in dark places - it's hard to hide without darkness.

Sometimes people speak of being kept in the dark about something - meaning that there were secrets that were unrevealed. People involved in the occult talk about dark powers, the secrets of which are only revealed to the initiated. In fact, Satan is called the Prince of Darkness.

Isaiah creates a vivid word picture pointing to the coming of Christ in Isaiah 60:2: *“See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.”*

Have you ever been in a situation when you were frightened and all you could do was wait for the dawn to come? As the sun rises, and the shadows begin to fade, everything changes and there is no more reason to be afraid. That's the picture we have of Christ.

In a world of difficulty and pain, Christ has come to lift the load and to heal the hurting. In a world of loneliness and anxiety, Christ has come to be an ever-present friend and the calmer of our hearts. He has come to restore us to relationship with our heavenly Father. In the darkness of our hopelessness, Jesus comes to shine the light of hope and a new beginning.

There has always been a battle between light and darkness. We see it most clearly in the life of Christ. When He was born as the light of the world, King Herod tried to kill him as a threat to his throne. Joseph and Mary had to flee to Egypt to keep Him alive. When He began His ministry the clash between the two kingdoms began in earnest - Jesus went everywhere preaching the good news of the kingdom.

When He encountered people who were possessed by demons - enslaved to forces beyond their control - He set them free. As it says in Luke 4, He preached good news to the poor; He proclaimed freedom for those who were in chains; He gave sight to the blind; He released the oppressed and declared that it was time for a change. It was time for a change in the way that people treated each other. It was time for a change in the way people looked at the world. It was time for a change in the way people lived their lives. It was time for a change of heart. He didn't come to make bad people good - He came to make dead people live.

All of this was a threat to the kingdom of darkness, so they manipulated and plotted and eventually had Jesus arrested; falsely charged, and ultimately convicted. Then He was hung on a cross between two thieves to die like a common criminal. And the light went out. And the people mourned. And the disciples hid. Hope died.

But three days later, something happened. The sun, and the Son, rose again. The tomb was empty, and the light shone and pierced the darkness. The grave could not hold Him. Light was cascading everywhere. It spread quickly. As John said, "*...to all who received*

Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.” Children of the light.

So what does that mean for us here today? What does it mean for those of us who claim to know this Jesus - this light of the world? If we know Him, His light shines in us. Jesus said in Matthew 5:16: “...*let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*”

Conclusion:

Let me paint you a picture of why we, as a church are here. You don't know the people that I'm talking about. She's in her forties now. She was raised in an alcoholic home and was abused as a child. She started acting out as a teenager and was put in foster care. She felt rejected by her family and looked for comfort in drugs and alcohol. She became addicted to various drugs at different times in her life. She hasn't been able to keep a job because she can't stay clean long enough. But her mother came to know Christ, and now she's trying to walk toward the light. She's the reason we're here.

He's a good old boy in his thirties. He drives a pickup truck. He's been drinking since he was a teenager and he never admitted it was a problem until his wife left him. Now he doesn't care that it's a problem. He doesn't have access to his kids and more and more lately he thinks about how much better off he'd be if he just didn't wake up some day. He needs the light of Christ. He's the reason we're here.

He's 72 and he's been in a nursing home since his wife died. He's so lonely he doesn't know what to do with himself. He went to church as a child, but had a really bad experience with those religious people and decided that he didn't believe in God any more. But his wife was a Christian, and he has a hard time denying that her faith was real. He wants to believe but doesn't know how to shake his doubts. He needs the light. He's the reason we're here.

She's eleven years old and in Grade 6. She's never been to church a day in her life. Her parents don't go either, and the subject of God

never comes up. Church is some strange concept to her. She's seen "The Simpsons" and thinks that all Christians are like Ned Flanders. She wants nothing to do with them because they're weird. Yet she has this nagging feeling that there's something missing, and she doesn't know what it is. She needs the light.

She's 21 and in her second year of university - taking psychology. She's been taught that the church is largely responsible for much that is wrong with the world. Her parents split up a few years ago, which she says is a good thing because she was afraid somebody was going to get hurt. They both dropped out of church when she was little, but her Mom now has started going back. She thinks her Mom's losing it. But she met a girl in University who has become her best friend. She's amazing, smart, funny, and one of the most caring people she's ever met - and she's a Christian. She doesn't know what to do with her because she already made up her mind about God a long time ago. Now she's not so sure. Whatever her friend has got, she wants some of it. She needs the light.

I've watched many of you over the last few years change from skeptics to seekers to believers to disciples. I have to say, there's no greater privilege than that. That is why we're here. God has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Now it's up to us. What do we do with that? Jesus told us not to hide it. Hold it up. Make a difference.

Some of you likely read the article in this week's paper that spoke of our 5-year relocation plan. It's exciting. It will include a High School size gymnasium, a Youth Wing, a Children's Wing, a chapel, meeting rooms and much more. Hopefully, all goes smoothly, but it's not about the building. The church is all about people, and the only reason we are building is so that we can better serve people, and help them to find a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Something was started here 25 years ago from one small spark. That spark found some fuel and God provided the oxygen, and that fire is burning brighter than ever today. Our prayer is that it would continue to

do so, and that God would use this body of believers to be a light for this Township.

Felix Adler said this: *“The hero is the one who kindles a great light in the world, who sets up blazing torches in the dark streets of life for men to see by. The saint is the man who walks through the dark paths of the world, himself a light.”* Jesus said *“You are the light of the world.”* Go light your world.