

Aug. 18 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The quote I chose for our preparation for worship this morning is from Leonard Cohen and reflects the Jewish concept of *Tikkun Olam*, which roughly translates to "World Repair." There is a Jewish idea that people are wounded like shattered vases, but there are sparks of God pulsating in the heap of broken pottery. Jewish thinkers have struggled to articulate the human role in repairing the brokenness of those folks so that God's light can fill them again. Paul reflects upon the metaphor of light in depth, stating that Gentiles were children of darkness who, through God's power, have been transformed into children of the light. Paul encourages us to walk as children of the light and to provide light to others.

Certainly, we live in a world of terrible darkness and broken people. The human toll of the war in Palestine and Ukraine has created refugees, trauma, and displacement. Climate change has broken the hearts and backs of many. A grand jury report recently stated that two-thirds of the people in Bonny Doon who lost their houses did not rebuild after the CZU fire. Then there was the pandemic and its aftermath. I placed a picture of my kids on the bulletin cover showing how we ate during the pandemic, pre-vaccines. We social distanced out on the deck no matter how cold, uncomfortable, or dark, but we were together. Those were dark days. But you also see in the picture Christmas lights that we hung on the porch so we could see. During this time, we grew closer together as a family as we navigated the dark alleys and shadows of that terrible time. The pandemic exposed and accentuated fissures in our social fabric.

Paul, in his time, was familiar with the fissures between Jewish and Greek culture. Earlier in Ephesians, he affirms that Christ broke down that deep dividing wall with this powerful theological statement: “For he is our peace, who made both one, and broke down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in the flesh the hostility, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man of the two, making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross.” Today, Christ is still our peace. He is still the new creation. He is still the cure for polarization. Paul gives specific instructions on how to heal the divides of his time and ours. The fruit of walking in the light is goodness, kindness, and truth. These are all outcomes that can draw people closer together. The best way to draw folks closer to one another is to draw closer to God by seeking to please the Divine, as Paul mentions here. Kierkegaard quipped that people who draw closer to God always draw closer to each other. Paul’s next admonition is to not only avoid deeds of darkness but to shine a light on them.

Ed Sams, in his contribution to the Santa Cruz Ghost Stories Anthology, wrote of someone who was in Boulder Creek, and when he stayed on the light side of the street, he was okay, but the protagonist kept drifting to the dark and shadowy side of the street because it was easier and less crowded, causing terrifying events. When he returns to the light side of the street, things change. Then Paul presents some wonderful prose: “That which is exposed is made obvious, which enlightens others.” He caps his argument with a reference to the resurrection, which is

always central to his thinking: “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine a light on you.” For Paul, this is autobiographical. Paul, in retelling his dramatic conversion story in Acts, said, “A light from heaven shone around me.” Paul felt that he had awakened from a dream or nightmare, as we do when the sun rises. Perhaps reflection on his conversion brought him to this conclusion: “It is a better use of our time to live an intelligent and examined life than an unthinking one.” However, here is the surprise: The intelligent and wise living person is surrounded by music, psalms, odes, poetry, and literature, which are employed to give glory to God.

This directly contradicts our culture. We feel that to be intelligent, we need to be skeptical and scientific. The head is important, but it is the heart that sings. In the military town where I lived, there was great debate over the value of arts and music in culture and education, which led to a deadlock over funding and resource allocation. A general submitted a wonderful op-ed piece to the paper, which stated in short that as a warrior, he fights for the preservation of culture, not to return from the battlefield to live in an endless dark age. He was, and is, a child of the light.

I will give one more example of the light. All of you walked with us through Lorraine’s healing pilgrimage. She was diagnosed with lymphoma right around Thanksgiving. We spent the 22nd of December going through some very tough challenges. As you know, that is the darkest day of the year. I felt that darkness in my soul, and I prayed. It then struck me that it was indeed dark, but every single day following those days

would lengthen, and the light would increase. That was true of the calendar and of our lives because all of you, as children of light, gave us hope every step of the way. You walked with us as children of the light. The last three weeks, when I have seen Lorraine at church, her face is shining. We stand among the children of light here at Trinity, with enlightened hearts and illuminated souls. For that, we are forever thankful. Amen.