

Sermon Series: “Bethlehem’s Light Still Shines”—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN— 12/9/07

Title: “In the midst of spiritual indifference the Light of Life still shines.”

Text: John 1: 9-13

Intro.: Ills.: The Day Niagara Went Silent

Theme: Even when the world exerted a collective yawn at God’s great gift in Jesus, the Father did not let it dissuade him from delivering on his promise to send his Son to bring the ultimate answer to the darkness of our sin.

Indifference can take the fun right out of living

- Indifference is our reaction to sin-broken the world
 1. To God’s promise: *The true light that gives light to every person has come into the world. John 1:9* comes angry denial
 2. Disappoint, anger, and despair over the hurt of sin done to us and through us
 3. Instead of acknowledging the brokenness and confessing/forgiving to be healed, we withdraw into it
 - a. Whether it is in the breakdown of a marriage or a parent/child relationship
 - b. Or the disintegration of a mutual relationship between us and our boss/company
 - c. Or even within the Body of Christ or among best friends, a distancing and separating is intentionally engaged
 4. Indifference can become a self-fulfilling prophecy as an endless cycle of destructive counter-reactions begins
- Indifference can blind us to solution which God proposes
 1. The world groans over the brokenness around it but misses the Creator who came to recreate it (**read vs. 9-10**)
 - a. *Creation was subjected to frustration but not by its own choice. The one who subjected it to frustration did so in the hope that it would also be set free from slavery to decay in order to share the glorious freedom that the children of God will have. We know that all creation has been groaning with the pains of childbirth up to the present time. Romans 8:20-22*
 - b. People who are part of that creation struggle with, yet reject the help/peace that only One who made can give
 - c. *“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. John 14: 27*
 - d. **Illus.: Missing the Maestro**
 2. Even among his own people, Jesus was rejected (**read vs. 11**)
 - a. God’s plan: **“That we might be reconciled to each other and in one body to God through the cross.” Eph 2:16**
 - b. Among his own Jewish people – *“Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown.” Luke 4: 24*
 - c. Even as Christians we do such destructive things and reject life-lines given, for the sake of face-saving pride
 - d. *When pride comes, then comes dishonor, But with the humble is wisdom. Proverbs 11:2*
 - e. Maybe, you are on the receiving end of that cynicism from another or maybe you are the one dishing it out
 - f. It has made you cynical and indifferent to what God has and wants to offer to you this Christmas season

God crosses the line, first, to make a difference in our indifference

- *Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the*

righteousness of God in Him. 2 Cor. 5:18-21

- God, the Father, makes for us a way to come home (**read vs. 12**)
- 1. God cares even when we don't (***Cast all of your worries upon him because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5: 7***)
 - a. *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Romans 8:32*
 - b. Christmas' great message of hope is that God does care in the midst of a world which does not seem to get it
- 2. God makes it simple — it is not about performance but about faith (**print vs. 13**)
 - a. It is by grace and faith – passively receiving what has already been secured for you on God's dime
 - b. *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God(12)*
 - c. When it is not about me or you, both of whom are fatally flawed, but about God — renewed hope is possible
- What God wants from us — a simple “yes” will do
 - 1. **Ills.: God longs to hear a “yes”**
 - 2. God wants you as his child; has demonstrated it through sending his Only Son in exchange for your life; and all He wants is for you to accept his invitation back to a life enlightened and filled with purpose and meaning
 - 3. *The true light that gives light to every person has come into the world. John 1: 9*

The Day Niagara Went Silent

An estimated 500,000 tons of water rush over Niagara Falls every minute. On March 29, 1948, the falls suddenly stopped. People living within the sound of the falls were awakened by the overwhelming silence. They believed it was a sign that the world was coming to an end. It was thirty hours before the rush of water resumed. What happened? Heavy winds had set the ice fields of Lake Erie in motion. Tons of ice jammed the Niagara River entrance near Buffalo and stopped the flow of the river until the ice shifted again. The flow of God's grace in our lives can be blocked by cold indifference. **Merle Mees in Fresh Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching (Baker), from the editors of Leadership**

Missing the Maestro

Joshua Bell emerged from the Metro and positioned himself against a wall beside a trash basket. By most measures, he was nondescript—a youngish white man in jeans, a long-sleeved T-shirt, and a Washington Nationals baseball cap. From a small case, he removed a violin. Placing the open case at his feet, he shrewdly threw in a few dollars and pocket change as seed money and began to play. For the next 45 minutes, in the D.C. Metro on January 12, 2007, Bell played Mozart and Schubert as over 1,000 people streamed by, most hardly taking notice. If they had paid attention, they might have recognized the young man for the world-renowned violinist he is. They also might have noted the violin he played—a rare Stradivarius worth over \$3 million. It was all part of a project arranged by *The Washington Post*—“an experiment in context, perception, and priorities—as well as an unblinking assessment of public indifference in today's society. In a banal setting, at an inconvenient time, would beauty transcend?” Just three days earlier, Joshua Bell sold out Boston Symphony Hall, with ordinary seats going for \$100. In the subway, Bell garnered about \$32 from the 27 people who stopped long enough to give a donation. **Gene Weingarten, "Pearls Before Breakfast," The Washington Post (4-10-07); submitted by Stephen Nordbye, Charlton, Massachusetts**

God longs to hear a “yes”

Tedd Kidd was five years older than Janet, finished college before her, and started to work in a city hundreds of miles from her. They always seemed to be at different places in their lives. But they had been dating for seven years. Every Valentine's Day, Tedd proposed to her. Every Valentine's Day, Janet would say, "No, not yet." Finally, when they were both living in Dallas, Texas, Tedd reached the end of his patience. He bought a ring, took Janet to a romantic restaurant, and was prepared to reinforce his proposal with the diamond. Another no would mean he had to get on with his life without her. After salad, entree, and dessert, it was time. Tedd

summoned up his courage. Knowing that Janet had a gift for him, however, he decided to wait. "What did you bring me?" he asked. She handed him a box the size of a book. He opened the package and slowly peeled away the tissue paper. It was a cross-stitch Janet had made that simply said, "Yes." *Yes* it is the word that God, in his tireless pursuit of the sinner, longs to hear. **Rubel Shelly, Nashville, Tennessee; story told at Janet's funeral after 17 years of marriage to Tedd**

John 1:9-13

⁹The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- ¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. [NIV]