March 15, 2015

John 3:14-21

A Journey to Resurrection: Believe Into

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John 3:14-21 NRSV

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

“I want to walk as a child of the light” is a hymn written by Kathleen Thomerson that I thought about all week. “I want to walk as a child of the light; I want to follow Jesus. God set the stars to give light to the world; the star of my life is Jesus. In him there is no darkness at all; the night and the day are both alike. The Lamb is the light of the city of God. Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.”

Last week we had daylight savings time, the bad one where we lose an hour of sleep. It cracked me up trying to explain this concept of the clock changing at 2 in the morning to my 7 year old. He could not understand it and truthfully, I don’t understand it either. I do know it has something to do with more sunlight for the working hours. In John’s Gospel there is this choice between light and darkness, between belief and unbelief.

A few weeks ago I was talking about Jesus in a sermon and I said something about how Jesus had changed my life. After the early service Katherine Noll asked me how Jesus had changed my life. I have always thought of my life as pretty ordinary. Sure, I have experienced great loss and tragedy, but I have always known that God was right there with me. I grew up in a home where we went to church. I grew up singing in the church choir, playing in the hand bells, and going to Sunday School. I feel like I should apologize to all of the preachers and teachers in my life because I don’t remember any sermons that I heard growing up, or any Sunday School lessons that I was taught. I do remember the peace and the comfort that I felt at church, whether I was in the sanctuary, sitting at a table in the Sunday School room or talking with my church friends. I felt safe at church. I felt warm at church and I learned at church Sunday after Sunday, that God loved me.

Glennon Melton is a popular blogger who writes Momastery. Last Sunday on facebook, she posted a picture of the sanctuary of her church and she wrote these words, “My church. Where I go to remember this: There is nothing I can do right, say right, or believe right to make God love me more. There is nothing I can do wrong, say wrong, or believe wrong to make God love me less. God’s love for me is unconditional and finished. God’s love for everyone else is unconditional and finished. That's some good news.” Jesus changed my life because Jesus showed me the love of a church family. Jesus changed my life because he showed me that here, in this place, I find light. Jesus changed my life because Jesus loves me. “I want to walk as a child of the light; I want to follow Jesus. God set the stars to give light to the world; the star of my life is Jesus. In him there is no darkness at all; the night and the day are both alike. The Lamb is the light of the city of God. Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.”

Ben Snider is getting baptized today. Ben has grown up in church, Ben has experienced the love of Jesus in this community of faith. I love Ben Snider because my first Sunday as pastor of Greenland Hills I was so worried about how my kids would fit in. Would they like this church? Would they have friends? Would they experience a loving community where they would experience the love of Jesus? That first Sunday in July 2013 our daughter Madeleine was on a trip with her grandparents and our then 5 year old son Everett was here all by himself with no big sister to help ease the way. And I looked outside Glory Be Hall during our welcome potluck and saw Ben Snider throwing a football with Everett. Ben did not have to do that. Ben is older than Everett, but Ben’s heart is so big. I am so thankful that Ben brought a football to church and that Ben reached out with the love of Jesus to my son. Thank you Ben for showing my son how good church can be.

This 40 day journey to Easter is an opportunity for us to think about our lives. Do we love darkness or light? Do our words and deeds show our love for darkness or our love for light? John’s Gospel tells us Jesus is the light of the world (9:5) and those who follow Jesus will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life (8:12). May we who walk in the dark not stumble because we see the light of this world (11:9). In John 12:35-36 it says, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

We all make a choice to walk in the light and to allow the light of Christ into our lives. We spent this past week in New York City. Monday morning when we left it was crazy getting everything in the car, taking out the trash, turning down the heat on the air conditioner, getting the dog to the vet. We were on schedule so we stopped at Cyndi’s deli for breakfast. It was still dark out (daylight savings time!) and raining. I got out of the car and ran across the parking lot to avoid the rain. I got under the overhang and turned and saw Everett running and a pick-up truck coming and started to scream. It happened so fast. And it really felt like time slowed down. The driver of the pick-up truck through the dark skies and the rain, somehow saw Everett and stopped. But, we were all shaking for a good ten minutes after we sat down. As we ate, we tried to forget the scariness of what had almost happened. I kept thinking about how your life can change in an instant.

And then, it was time to go to the airport, but our check had not arrived. We asked the waitress and she said that the person that was sitting next to us had covered our tab. I could not believe it. Nothing like that had ever happened to me before. I went from feeling alone to feeling a part of something larger. From darkness to light. A part of a community of people who are all on this journey trying to love God more, trying to love each other more.

In Jesus, God becomes flesh and lives among us to bring light and hope. And we need saving because we are used to the darkness. We like how the darkness hides our imperfections and sins. When we step into the light, people will see what we have been trying to hide in the darkness. When we step into the light, we will have to give up all of the junk that we have been clinging to for so long. When we step into the light, we have to let go of all of the things that stop us from receiving Christ as our savior.

God’s intention is to save, not to condemn. And the judgment from God is that we love darkness more than light. It is our choice. Believing in Christ means choosing light, it means choosing not to condemn. It means letting go of our fears and our insecurities that are keeping us from the light. We don’t want people to see who we really are; we don’t want people to see our secrets so we hide from the light. But Jesus wants us to choose light today. Jesus wants us to choose vulnerability by coming into the light. Jesus is reminding us that we need each other. To bring a football to church, to pay for someone’s meal, to show us with each sunrise that the light of Jesus shines in our hearts.

My friend, Pastor Ella Luna, is the pastor at Casa Emanuel right down the road and shared a Dietrich Bonhoeffer prayer on facebook a few days ago. Dietrich Bonhoeffer prayed, “I cannot do this alone. O God, early in the morning I cry to you. Help me to pray and to concentrate my thoughts on you; I cannot do this alone. In me there is darkness, but with you there is light; I am lonely, but you do not leave me. I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help. I am restless, but with you there is peace. In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience; I do not understand your ways, but you know the way for me… Restore me to liberty, and enable me to live now that I may answer before you and before men. Lord whatever this day may bring, your name be praised. Amen.”

1. Scripture references from <http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Walking-in-the-Light-Alyce-McKenzie-03-12-2012?offset=1&max=1#ixzz3TlV42iKs> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)