

Sermon for 14 Feb 2021

Light in the Darkness and never give up

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2 Kings 2:1-12:2. Corinthians 4:3-6. Mark 9:2-9.

2 Corinthians 4 says that:-

3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Today's readings are all about shining and dazzling lights and not giving up.

I started to work on this sermon on 27th January, Holocaust Memorial Day. The theme for this 76th anniversary of that dark time in our history is "Be the light in the darkness" That is such a challenge and **is** the challenge of 2 Corinthians - for God said, *let light shine out of darkness because He has shone light into our hearts so that we can shine it out , the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, to all whose minds have been blinded by Satan, the god of this world, to stop them seeing the good news of the glory of Christ.* The challenge to us, is to shine that light and open the eyes of those who are blind to the sacrifice that Jesus made for us.

As I was considering this, I listened to a podcast on the Piers Morgan show of an interview with Lily Egbert. Lily is 97, Lily is a Hungarian Jew and was incarcerated in Auschwitz when she was 14 years of age. Not only did Lily survive Auschwitz but

now at the age of 97 she has survived Covid 19. Like Elisha, who we will look at in a moment, Lily never gave up and said she chose life and determined to carry on and fight, because we have to carry the light to shine in the darkness. This reminded me of Deuteronomy 30.19 which says – *This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.*

Not only did Lily choose life for herself but she has 3 children and 34 grandchildren, one of whom is a young man who was with her at the interview. He now has determined to bring Lily and her message to the world's attention by publicising it on all the social media he can. That is how they came to be on the Piers Morgan morning show and also on the BBC Today programme on radio.

Lily said that if she got the chance she would tell the world that we have to be tolerant to one another and the main thing is to understand when someone is different to yourself and be tolerant. When the concentration camp was liberated an American soldier gave her a bank note and she was overwhelmed by the kindness that somebody had given something and her message is, never give up, do what we can to help each other and be the light in the darkness.

I was still sitting considering Lily's message when the phone rang, it was friend called Gerry Brown who I have known for years. He used to come to Holy Saviour Church in Hitchin where I was curate. Gerry mainly came to church because his lovely wife Annabel was in the choir. One Sunday Gerry came to me on the way out, to shake my hand, as was the practise, and said to me, Randy why don't they get it? Gerry became a Christian that morning and was hungry for the Lord. Gerry helped set up a chapter of the Full Gospel Businessmen in the town and was eager to shine the light of the gospel to all he met. A number of years ago Gerry contracted Myeloma. Myeloma is cancer of the blood; it attacks the bone marrow and

gets into all the bones. Gerry was a big strong man but gradually he became more and more bent. He has gone through I don't know how many courses of chemo therapy but some time ago the doctors called all the treatment to an end. But Gerry chose life - Gerry wanted to shine the light in the darkness - he still rings two of his non-Christian friends to tell them about Jesus. His son is now ordained and one of his daughters is an ordinand, Annabel still sings in the choir and another daughter and her husband are involved in church youth work. Despite all the darkness they want to shine the light so that others might see the glory.

Then in our gospel reading we read that the brightness of Jesus on the mountain top is so dazzling that the disciples were so terrified that Peter did not know what to say. Moses and Elijah were there talking with Jesus, remember how Moses face used to shine so brightly when he had been meeting with God on the mountain top. Moses and Elijah are quite possibly the two witnesses we meet in Revelation, prophesying the light of Christ against the darkness of the time of the beast that comes out of the sea. As the disciples came down from their mountain top experience of seeing Jesus transfigured and talking with Moses and Elijah and then hearing the voice of God from the cloud they were told not to say anything. However, I would say now, if you have had a mountain top experience and seen the face of Christ do not keep it to yourself but tell everyone you can, be the light to shine in the darkness.

But to come back to Elijah and Elisha don't you just love Elisha. Like Lily Egbert, like Gerry Brown, Elisha just would not give up no matter how Elijah tried to put him off and get rid of him. *2 Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."* Elijah could not shake him off.

Then - *4 Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you*

yourself live, I will not leave you.” Again Elisha was determined to hang in there.

Then even a third time. *6 Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.” But he said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.”*

Such determination from Elisha, he knew what was going to happen and he had no doubt that he needed to be part of it, no matter how Elijah and the other prophets tried to put him off. We need to have that same determination and stickability to choose to hang in there with Jesus no matter what situations we come up against. One of our team at the healing centre, David Morton, died of Covid on the 26th January but nothing could take away his knowledge and belief that it is the nature and will of Jesus to heal and in the hour before he died wanted to hear the voices of his Pastor Davey Falcus and of me speaking the gospel into his life and so he got his daughter to ring us and put the phone on speaker. David wanted to shine the light into the darkness.

Elisha wanted to be there to inherit a double share of the Spirit that Elijah had. That reminds me of probably the most common prayer during the times of charismatic renewal and the Toronto blessing – More Lord, More Lord. What we were receiving in the fullness of the Spirit was marvellous but still we wanted more. Elisha was well blessed and renowned as a prophet in his own right but he wanted more, he wanted twice as much of the Spirit as Elijah had. Are we still hungry? We must never be content with who we are, what we are, what we have, ready to sit back and feel we have done enough, become complacent about how good and pleasant and acceptable our church life is, our ministry is. No we need to be like Elisha, like Lily Egbert like my friends, choose life and strive to shine more light no matter what the darkness or the circumstances and want more of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then be like Elisha, receive the impartation and don't just sit there and admire it but go straight in and test it out. Elisha did

not hesitate, he tore up his old clothes and took up the mantle that Elijah had dropped, walked to the Jordan, and struck the water with the cloak and the waters parted. The first of his miracles.

Depending as to what you count as miracles there are varying counts by theologians, some say 7 to Elijah 14 to Elisha, others 14 to 28 but the Midrash which is an ancient commentary on part of the Hebrew scriptures, part of the Talmudic literature, has 8 to Elijah and 16 to Elisha. Whichever count you accept it is double the miracle power to Elisha. I feel sure that Elisha would have been counting and realise he was still one short when he died so when he went to heaven I can imagine him having a go at Father God saying but Father you promised me double the portion but I am one short of twice as many as Elijah. Then Father saying to him, don't lose your hair Elisha, just have a look down there. When Elisha looks down to earth he sees them throw the body of a dead man into his grave and when the dead man touches Elisha's bones he immediately comes to life and stands up making the score 16 to Elisha and 8 to Elijah. (2 Kings 13 20 -21.)

So chose life, with more of the Spirit as power in your lamp and go shine the light into the darkness.