

Lighting up the World
 October 14, 2007 Isaiah 58:9-12
 Dr. June Goudey, Pastor, UCC Simi Valley CA

As I prepared to speak to the Mayor again this week, Alice Linsmeier sent along some words by Archbishop Romero that I've printed for today's reflection. She hoped I would receive inspiration, when I read: "people who avoid every thorny matter so as not to be harassed, so as not to have conflicts and difficulties, do not light up the world they live in." The effect Alice hoped for was achieved. I felt stronger and clearer in purpose. I also knew that I had reached a new point of reference for myself as a person and as a pastor.

For a good portion of my life, I've never thought of myself as someone who could light up a room much less the world. I know Jesus told his disciples, you are the light of the world, but I never thought he meant me. Besides, I knew that lighting up the world too brightly can get one killed. For all his eloquence Oscar Romero was gunned down at the altar of his church in San Salvador in March of 1980. Like Jesus, he faced the oppressions of his time and suffered the consequences. There's more to this story than meets the eye, but for a moment let me digress.

My Mom likes to tell the story that one day when I was three she looked out the kitchen window and saw me walking backwards up the driveway towards the street in front of our house--- I looked like this (putting bag on head). I was sure that if I could not see anyone else, they could not see me. I was wrong and my actions at the time were amusing. But over time, without my knowing it the bag stayed on my head ... like this (turning bag around to show eye holes)---whatever light I could muster grew dimmer and dimmer as I chose the bush over a lamp stand and silence over truth, even my own truth.

My faith encouraged me other wise but breaking through was not an easy project. It has taken many years of painful self-reflection to take multiple bags of fear off my head and lay down layer upon layer of archeological baggage from my heart.

Today, I can truly say life is different- I long ago put down learned homophobic behavior and misdirected anger. I have been converted, I have turned around and allowed my life to be turned upside down and inside out so many times that the light of God's grace has no where to shine in me but outwardly in the world and on behalf of the world.

I have learned to make Isaiah's wisdom my own.

"If you remove the yoke from among you,
 the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
 if you offer your food to the hungry
 and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
 then your light shall rise in the darkness
 and your gloom be like the noonday."

This morning your spirit may not feel buoyant and your head may be spinning from the anger directed our way from those protesting our sanctuary stance, but I want to share with you some simple steps towards recovering your birth light. In doing so, I hope you'll discover your own path to transformation.

Some of you may just want to watch, but I'm hoping a number of you will join me. Do I have any volunteers? Good. Now before we start, I want each of you to do a full body scan-- close your eyes and imagine you are looking at yourself from head to toe. Now identify one thing you are feeling... something like joy, excitement, anxiety, fear, strength. Whatever it is and there is no right or wrong answer here, please

turn to someone next to you and say what you saw. Now can one or two of you just shout those words out—don't wait, just put it out there. [Examples given: uncertainty, confusion, strength]

Ok, now just follow me... if you don't want to follow let me ask you to move towards the outside of the space so you can be our witnesses. [June leads congregation in Interplay techniques]

Take a deep breathe, shake out your voice, one arm, other arm, one leg, the other leg, now whatever you are sitting on.

One hand dance begins to music of Amazing Grace on behalf of those who are standing or sitting at the edges. Now find a partner and touch hands. Prayer on behalf of continues. [Now Bob plays something light and playful.] Now let your mischievous spirit out as you dance. Now can I have several of you come forward and do a dance on behalf of the whole congregation and on behalf of those outside who are stuck in fear?

The rest of you can watch or stand where you are and either dance with one hand, two hands or your whole body. [The congregation then danced to Lee Ann Womack's "I Hope You Dance."]

I hope you never lose your sense of wonder
 You get your fill to eat
 But always keep that hunger
 May you never take one single breath for granted
 God forbid love ever leave you empty handed
 I hope you still feel small
 When you stand by the ocean
 Whenever one door closes, I hope one more opens
 Promise me you'll give faith a fighting chance

And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance
 I hope you dance
 I hope you dance

I hope you never fear those mountains in the distance
 Never settle for the path of least resistance
 Living might mean taking chances
 But they're worth taking
 Lovin' might be a mistake
 But it's worth making
 Don't let some hell bent heart
 Leave you bitter
 When you come close to selling out
 Reconsider
 Give the heavens above
 More than just a passing glance

And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance
 I hope you dance
 (Time is a real and constant motion always)
 I hope you dance
 (Rolling us along)
 I hope you dance
 (Tell me who)

I hope you dance
 (Wants to look back on their youth and wonder)
 (Where those years have gone)

I hope you still feel small
 When you stand by the ocean
 Whenever one door closes, I hope one more opens
 Promise me you'll give faith a fighting chance

And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance
 Dance

I hope you dance
 I hope you dance
 (Time is a real and constant motion always)
 I hope you dance
 (Rolling us along)
 I hope you dance
 (Tell me who)
 (Wants to look back on their youth and wonder)
 I hope you dance
 (Where those years have gone)

(Tell me who)
 I hope you dance
 (Wants to look back on their youth and wonder)
 (Where those years have gone)

Now what feelings are you able to shout out? [Examples given: community, connection, relaxed, joy]

[June continues]

If we stop living in fear and learn to live on behalf of others, we not only light up the world, we transform it for the better. As the Apostle Paul preached, we become *ambassadors* for God who appeals to the world through us. This final prayer has often been attributed to Oscar Romero but its true author was Bishop Ken Untener. Listen to its wisdom:

“It helps now and then to step back and take the long view.

The reign of God is not only beyond our efforts.

It is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying the reign of God always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the church's mission.

We cannot do everything but there is a sense of liberation in realizing that because this enables us to do something and to do it well. It may be incomplete but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.”

May you come to trust God’s amazing grace, recover the light in you and learn to share it boldly. Then may each of us, together and alone, light up the world on behalf of justice and God’s realm of peace. Amen.