

ON YOUR DARKEST DAY
July 31, 2016 John 1: 4-5
The Church of the Covenant

Our dear Associate Pastor *Emeritus*, Randy Boyer, who passed away several years ago after a courageous battle with cancer, became a dear and cherished friend to me, as well as a great colleague in ministry. I wrote in my sermon notebook right before he passed away that while much of it all seemed very dark and troubling, that nevertheless the light had shown through his life and faith and ministry. And then I wrote: "And there is always light..." His last sermon was preached in the context of our healing service in November before he passed away. We had all gathered in the chapel. It was filled to overflow with people praying. It was, as always, a brilliant service. He used as his text Psalm 88, certainly one of the darkest and least positive and least light-filled Psalms in all of scripture. Normally, there may be negative and "downer" portions of a particular Psalm but then it will conclude: "I will again praise you, my Lord and my God" or something to that effect. So it ends on an upbeat note. Not so, Psalm 88. Preachers avoid it for that very reason. As I was sitting there in that healing service that November I remember thinking, "I am not sure I have ever heard anyone ever preach on this text before." But my friend, Randy, did.

He intoned as he read the text: *"For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol (to death). I am reckoned among those who go down into the Pit; I am a man who has no strength, like one forsaken among the dead...Thou (O Lord) hast put me in the depths of the Pit, in the regions dark and deep..." (Psalm 88: 3-6)* Wow, what a dark and deep Psalm. And sitting there listening to him read it I think we all realized what Randy was saying to us through this scripture –I am soon going away. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. It was extraordinarily moving, people wept, we understood our dear friend was going into the embrace of God.

He continued to read the text: *"Every day I call upon Thee, O Lord; I spread my hands out to Thee...Is Thy steadfast love declared in the grave?...Are Thy wonders known in the darkness?" (Psalm 88: 9-12)* Randy had hit the wall. His own strength was no more –we all realized it in that moment. It was his darkest day...it was our dark day, as well.

And then didn't we expect it to end differently? Didn't we think there would be some chirpily optimistic ending to the Psalm? Didn't we expect some tip of the hat to faith? To God's healing power? To hopefulness in the face of darkness. But the Psalm concluded: *"...my companions are all in darkness" (Psalm 88: 18)* And indeed, on that Tuesday evening in November we were all in darkness; it had descended upon all our souls; for all of our praying and hoping and believing we all knew, in our heart, what was to be next. The healing service was over in more ways than one. It was to be the last time Randy preached in this life...

But that was not the end of the story of that night. After the service, as was our custom, Randy and I would gather up in my office to sort of unpack the service. What had gone well? What had not gone so well? Where did we see God at work? What had actually happened in the service spiritually? And, for the life of me, as Randy stood in the doorway of my office I would swear on a stack of Bibles that his face was shining. There was a glow, spiritual certainly, but almost physical, a light shining from the face of my dear friend and brother. Peace and glory, shining from his face. As I have reflected on that over these years, I think it is analogous to where the Bible records that Moses' face shown so brightly, as he went up the mountain to have his personal encounter with God, that he needed to cover his face with a veil, so as to not frighten the people of God. And as I looked at Randy's face, I knew in that service, as

he had poured out his heart to the Almighty, as he had expressed the deep darkness coming over his soul, as he admitted his own strength had failed and it felt all darkness with very little light about it, out of the darkness shown a light. Out of God's presence the light shineth. The same light at creation, shown from Randy's face. The light recorded as shining in the Book of Genesis, shown from Randy. The life that is the light of all men, all people, was shining from his face.

Jesus is the way and the truth and the LIFE. Jesus IS the Light of the world. As our scripture tells us in the Gospel according to John: *"In HIM (in Jesus) was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."* (John 1: 4) On our darkest day, the light shall shineth. It comes not from us or our own strength and power. It comes from Jesus. And the darkness will not win. The darkness cannot overcome the light. To walk through the valley of the shadow on our darkest day, to tread the verge of Jordan, to have been on the mountaintop in the midst of the deep thundering darkness surrounding it, and to see the Lord, face-to-face, is to have the light shine. Light always shines OUT OF darkness. The light of Christ will shine OUT OF our darkest day.

This is our promise in Jesus.

A postscript. I love infant baptisms. Today at 943 I have the great opportunity to baptize a wonderful little girl, with the most perfect chubby cheeks and the bluest eyes you ever saw. I love the moment when I am walking up the aisle and I always say the little rubric in baptism –*"See what great love God has for us. That we should be called children of God, and so we are."* In that moment I always watch your faces. There is a kindness and a love always written there for that child. There is a light which shines from your eyes. For me, it is a sacred, special moment. Because the way the parents look at their child in baptism, and the way we look at that child in baptism, is the very same way, I believe, that our heavenly Father looks at us through the eyes of baptism as well. That's what I observe shining from your faces. That's the light that comes from God.

That light shines from our faces and dances from our eyes. It reminds us of a light we always have, today, tomorrow and forever, the glory of God in the face of Christ, a light shining in the darkness that the darkness can *never* overcome. On our darkest day, **Let there be light**. It was the first day, "in the beginning" of God's creation. And God said: "Let there be light." And there was light. And God saw that it was GOOD. Amen and Amen.

By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!