

“This is Our Story; This is Our Song: Led Out of Darkness”

OT: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Psalter: Psalm 23

Epistle: Ephesians 5:8-14

NT: John 9:1-41

## **Read John 9:1-41**

The Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

Bill Gayle shared an oldie but a goodie with me this week:

Lord, you know I don't like buttermilk. Lord, you know I don't like lard.

And, Lord, you also know I don't much care for raw flour.

But when you mix them all together and bake them, I sure do love fresh buttermilk biscuits. So Lord, when things come up we don't like and when life gets hard and we're thrown a curve. When we just don't understand what you are saying to us, help us to wait until You are finished doing the fixing and probably it will be something even better than biscuits.

Isn't this where we are today? And I don't just mean with the coronavirus.

Life is hard. Life is a struggle. Life is dark. Not all the time, but certainly some of the time. And darkness does not discriminate. Even for those of us who do everything in our power to follow God faithfully. Being a disciple of Christ doesn't mean an easy road and life of ease. Being a disciple of Christ doesn't make us immune to the darkness of the world. We don't have to look any further than Jesus' life to understand this.

I wish it wasn't the case, but the truth is darkness is a part of life and it comes in many different forms. For one it might be a disease or a tragic accident that left someone crippled. For another it might be a premature death of a family member. For another it might be addiction. For another it might be shame or worry or expectation or disappointment or loneliness. And let's not forget what Paul teaches us... “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” Our sin- our turning our back on God- is the ultimate darkness.

The good news for us... the good news of Jesus Christ... is that there is light. In the beginning, amidst all the chaos and darkness and formless void, God said, “Let there be light” and there was, and God said, “it is good.” It is good because it is God. God is the source of all light. And because God is the source of light, no darkness will ever overcome it. So, as much as darkness is a truth, the ultimate truth we all should be holding on to with our life is the truth of God's light.

This bring us to the plot of our story and our song today: with God we are led out of darkness.

Our story, our song as Gods chosen and anointed, like the story of David Chad read a few moments ago, is to follow God closely, and when we do, we are blessed because God will never leave us or forsake us; God will never give us more than we can handle or bear the brunt of; God doesn't ask us to be someone we are not or lead us into situations that put our faith and trust and relationship with God in jeopardy. God gave David a lot of responsibility, beginning with calling him in from the fields and anointing him before his father and older brothers. David would go on to face giants, be a king, and even make some very poor choices. David's life was hard. At times it was a struggle. But David knew God was with him and David knew God would lead him out of whatever darkness surrounded him. Fortunately for us we can read about his story of deliverance as he later writes in his most familiar Psalm:

*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. (Psalm 23:1-3)*

Our story, our song is also like that of the man born blind. His encounter with Jesus that day was life changing for him. Up to that point, the man's only reality was blindness. The towns people and the pharisees all new him as the blind man and because he was blind, that meant he must either have been born in his parent's sin or he himself had sinned. To them, his blindness was a burden placed on him as punishment. But Jesus, the light of the world, flips the script. Not only does he clarify that the man was not blind because of sin, but he flips the story on the pharisees who are now after Jesus for healing on the sabbath. Jesus gives light to the man and through the light gives him life. And what does the man do in response? He tells his story. He doesn't have all the answers. He doesn't know exactly how Jesus did what he did, but he shared what he did know and left the blanks for God to fill in. Jesus' encounter with the man born blind wasn't just a passing event. Jesus met the man, healed the man, guided the man, and even returned to reveal himself as the Christ to the man. After that, the man born blind not only had light and life, he had assurance that Jesus was there and always would be.

We are all in need of being pulled from the shadows and led out of darkness. We are all in need of being freed from the ranks of society and led to the green pasture. And who better to do that than THE "light of the world." Brothers and Sisters in Christ, our faith in God and Jesus as our Lord and Savior will lead us into the light. No one else, no thing else can do this the way Jesus can. It is ok to reach out, hold Jesus' hand, and allow him to guide you. This is what Jesus does best. Jesus leads. When one sheep is lost, Jesus searches until he finds. When a son who was lost and gone forever returns home, Jesus opens his arms to embrace and welcome.

I want to share two stories now that illustrate being led out of darkness. The first is a testimonial from Russell Okung, an offensive lineman with the Seattle Seahawks.

I grew up being extremely self-sufficient. My father passed away when I was a young child, making me the man of the household. Since then I've taken on that responsibility. As I grew up I did a lot of things for myself and became really independent.

In college, a hurricane went through Houston and my mom and sister were at the house by themselves — I was off at school. It was a tough time. They called and said the house had flooded.

They told me they would be all right, but I remember looking at myself and asking, "Why?" Why was this going on? Why did my father pass away when I was a child? Why did I feel this way? Lots and lots of "whys."

In asking "why", I learned that some things were just out of my control; I couldn't do everything on my own. I thought that there had to be something bigger to make sense of what was happening in my life.

I remember sitting at chapel one day when God spoke to me. It's crazy how God will come to you even in the most small, subtle ways — maybe even a whisper. He told me "You don't have to do this alone. You're not by yourself."

At that moment, I realized God had always been there — since I was a very small child even. Even though I thought I was doing things on my own, I couldn't have done anything without God leading me. When that had happened, I knew God could only be my present hope.

The second is inspired by a blog post from Sarah Mae entitled "You Were Made to Sparkle: How God takes our dark stories and turns them into light."

I believe the world is desperate for healthy people — people who are willing to have the dark places turned into light. And isn't it just lovely how God takes those dark places in our lives and offers to turn them into light?

We all have a story that's unfolding through our lives that won't be complete until heaven, but it all has purpose if we are willing to go through the dark to get to the light.

We can choose whether we stay in our dark places — to be resentful and bitter and scared so that we don't grow and let light in — or not.

The Lord is tender and kind, and He will lead us toward freedom throughout our whole lives. We have the opportunity to accept or reject His guidance. We can hide and act like we're okay, or we can get real vulnerable and walk through the fire in order to come out shining just a little bit brighter.

Let's say you are broken over something, and you cry out to God about it, and then the next day everything seems fine and you think, Oh, it's really not a big deal. Have you ever done that? That's the moment to make a move to deal with it and say, "Okay, God, I'm ready and willing." If you don't, I can assure you that "thing" will come up later. God always seems to bring things back until we deal with them.

Often, when we first share news of a hardship or loss or personal addiction with others, we don't want to do it. It seems safer to hold it in and just bottle it up. We convince ourselves that no one else wants to hear what we are going through. We tell ourselves that God will miraculously heal us and no one will ever know. God is good and God is miraculous, but have we considered that God's leadership might also be leading us to do something else rather than remain alone.

So here is the thing I learned by trusting in God's leadership: that it is ok to be open and vulnerable with others. To share our darkness with the world can be painful. We might even cry the whole time we are doing it. That is ok. Our tears are what make the emotions and struggle real for us. God will give us the courage and strength to share our stories with others, no matter how sad or hard they are, and God will also give us the supply of tears we need to shed, even when we think we don't have any more.

The reason God gives us the courage and strength is because sharing our stories with others is a gift. A gift to us and a gift to others. How? Because they remind us, we are not alone. On the one hand, the retelling of our story is telling a part of God's story. God is always with us, even when we choose not to acknowledge. On the other hand, the darkness we experience may very well be similar to someone else. And how I seek healing in something might be what someone else needs to hear to help them seek healing.

Sarah concludes her blog post with this: "Our stories aren't just for us — they are for those who are hurting and in need of hope. In sharing our stories, we get to partner with God in being light-bearers for His Kingdom."

Accompanying Sarah's blog post was Psalm 40:1-3, also considered a psalm of David.

*I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry.*

*<sup>2</sup> He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.*

*<sup>3</sup> He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD.*

God wants to lead us out of whatever darkness we may be facing. God is peace. God is love. God is hope. God is light. As God does it for one of us, God will do it for all of us. Let us never forget that our stories and songs of God's deliverance in our lives give light to the ways God has, is, and will work throughout the world.

As I did last week, I would like to close this week with a song that stood out to me while I reflected on these texts. The song is "Dead Man Walking" by Jeremy Camp.

*Freedom was something I never found,... Trying to find six feet underground  
Under the weight of all of my sin,... Fighting the fight that I couldn't win*

*Pre: Then You rescued me And now I can breathe*

*Chorus: I was a dead man walking Until I was a man walking with You  
I was a blind man falling Until I felt the life You're calling me to  
Pulling me out of the darkness and Pulling me out of the lies  
Putting the beat in my heart again  
I was a dead man walking Until You loved this dead man walking back to life*

*I look for the words but cannot explain... A new kind of love ran into my veins  
You are the key to all of my chains... To all that I was, now I'm not a slave*

*Pre: Chorus:*

As we call attest, now is a very interesting and dare I say dark time for a lot of people. Perhaps right now is a dark time for you. As a community, we are called to look out for one another and be light-bearers. Our son Luke has recognized this past week that there are a lot of helpers doing a lot of things for people right now. He wanted to know how he could be a helper. There are lots of ways you can be a helper, a light-bearer, but one specific thing I would like to encourage us to do is to share our stories of when God has led you or is leading you, out of darkness. Call me; call any one of us; email us; post on Facebook; and share your short story or song of how God delivered you or a loved one. Call one another; call a loved one. Together... with God... with one another... we will all be led out of darkness into the light.

Let all God's people say, Amen.

## Prayers of the People

At this time, Chad, Kathleen, and Cat are going to join me and we are going to offer a prayer that was adapted from a poem written by Brother Richard Hendrick just over a week ago.

As God's church, may this be our prayer today... let us pray...