

Calvary United Methodist Church
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WHAT WILL WE DO WITH THIS LIGHT?

Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children's Message:

Isaiah 60:1-5

I invite our children to come forth at this time for the Children's Message. There are a few children in the house. Come on up. Welcome! Wow! This is wonderful! This is the best gift I've had all year! Good to see you all here today. Did you all have a great Christmas? And a wonderful New Year's? It's good to have you here today.

When I got up this morning it was pretty dark outside and looked kind of gloomy. And then I read this scripture and I said, "Lord, how can I do that?" It says: Arise and shine! And I'm like: oh... Did any of you do that this morning? Did any of you do that this morning? But you know what? I arose and I'm trying to shine because I know why we're here and you know why we are here. We are here to love God and to love one another. That's a privilege. God said, "I sent someone very special to you." Jesus Christ, that baby that we just celebrated. And when he came he could change everything.

Did some of you go to Sunday School today and hear the story of the Magi? Yeah. Those three wise men or Magi came to offer their gifts. And so they were so thankful...there are a lot of things to give thanks for...for our families and our friends and freedoms that we have, but mostly today we thank God that He sent Jesus to teach us how to love one another. It's not always easy to learn that lesson, is it? Because not everybody around is as nice as you. Like sometimes people hurt our feelings. Do you get your feelings hurt? Often when they mean well they don't realize sometimes we say and do things that hurt us. I want to believe most of the time we're good people, but we don't think that we say hurt things.

So, in this scripture lesson it says: Arise, shine for your light has come...and the light is Jesus. He's living in our hearts. He says it's come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth...thick darkness over the peoples. But the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look about you: all assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the hip. Turn your look around will be radiant and your heart will throb and swell with joy. The wealth of the seas will be brought to you and the riches of the nations will come.

It's pretty amazing that when we are feeling down and gloomy all of a sudden we look out. Do you ever feel good when you see a sunrise? I know I do. The sun and even just light without the sun, you get up in a dark room and you turn it on and you feel brighter. Can I say you are a lightbulb? You are. You shine bright. When you come up here, when I said I am happy, I'm happy because it is so nice. It is nice to see the choir, it is nice to see you, nice to see friends.

Right? You are a gift from God all the time because he says: Arise, let that light shine in your life.

And I want you to know, when we wake up in the morning, we have a choice every day. We can put on a smiley face or frown. Which one makes you feel better? (Child speaks.) See? Do you always feel like the smile? No. I don't either. But we have a choice because if you feel all gloomy all day long, guess what? People kind of feel sad too.

Now, let's be honest...there are days we are going to feel sad, right? Things happen. It's okay. And you can tell your friends, "I need a smile from you because I'm having a bad day." We don't have to pretend. We can actually be sad from time to time, but we have to do all that we can to let God's heart be done so that we can be those smiley people and that people around us will see that light because I know when I see something like this and just see the sunshine come up in the morning, if I am in the office and it's dark and all of a sudden the clouds go away and the sun comes up, I feel my frown just go... Does that work for you? Some days you just feel better? I bet sometimes when you see a certain friend walk in the room your frown turns to a smile. Right? Out there? Yeah. Some people just brighten your day.

There are things when we talk about what it is to rise and let God's glory, God's glory will shine on you in different ways. For instance, some of you I bet like to do things with your hands like baking cookies, right? And some of you really like to play sports at times? And some of you really like to study and read. And some of you like to sing and some of us like to dance and some people like to build. God will shine through you by doing what you love and that's a great thing because being one who shines, guess what? Other people are looking at you. And they are saying: boy, those people are really happy. Of you ask them why they will say: Well, because God is shining through me. I love doing what I do and God's going to live through us.

It's so neat when we see people who are happy together and people enjoying life and that is exactly why the baby Jesus came. We often keep him in a cradle, but guess what? How many of you are still sleeping in a little cradle? Not a whole lot do that, right? Because you are a lot taller than you were last year, right? Everybody here getting bigger? We'll go easy on that. We are all getting taller, right? We grow and we grow and we grow. And Jesus went from that baby to an adult man who was going around teaching people. He didn't stay a baby. Babies are wonderful, but he became a man and he was teaching people how to love one another.

It's amazing. Not everybody liked Jesus, but Jesus never turned people away. If he saw people were sick or in prison or people that made bad mistakes, he always told them he was there to send God's love. That's important for us to remember today.

There are painful things in our lives and God says even though sometimes we do and say

things we shouldn't, God says what? Does he love us? All the time. He doesn't like all the things we do, but God loves us and wants you to know that. And so we are offered to be like Jesus and we should be like him: to love other people, to care for other people, to help other people anytime you can because that's our way to shine. And you do it mostly with the things you already love. God doesn't usually ask you for a lot of things that you don't normally have the power to do.

So, I thank you for coming up and learning to shine today. When you leave here today and every Sunday I hope you arise, say "Thank you, God for this day. Let me shine for you today."

There are some fruit snacks here for you and I wish you a wonderful week and pray God's blessings on you.

Message:

Christmas is over. We have received the gift. The gift is the Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Most of the time when you get a gift it is something you use, something you enjoy, something you wear. What if you could wear Jesus? Holy, what if we could love like Jesus? So Holy. And whoever came his way we love for his loyalty.

These magi weren't really Jewish leaders at the time. They were noble people. They were well educated people. They knew the Hebrew Scriptures, but they were people who had heard a proclamation and moved forward because they wanted to present the gifts to the one because they interpreted that Word was going to change the world.

Our world is broken. We've seen a lot of news this week. It's hurting. It's become violent. We get after one another with a vengeance, yet at some point God says: I'm sending you the Prince of Peace and I would like you to be peacemakers. It starts in our hearts that we can be at peace with self. It reaches out into our family, into our communities that we can learn. Because without that how in the world well we pay things forward? How can we pass it to our children if we are filled with ugliness and disdain versus filled with the light? If we arise every morning knowing that Christ is indeed my All-in-all, then I can arise and I can be filled with praise even in my most difficult days, even though I might be tearing.

This morning is a broken day for me, that we can't honor one another. We don't always agree, but that we can somehow learn to love. In the world in which we live, we don't often see as far forward as we'd like because we are caught up in the instant.

I was a fireman long ago, but I know this more from being in traffic. Have you ever sat in traffic sometime and an hour later you go by like a bump on the road and praise God no one was hurt, but then you say: What's going on? And the firemen and policemen say: Oh, it was long-neckers. You know what they are, don't you? People that slow down and want to see what's going on out there. We are all long-neckers. We are nosy. I grew up in a little

town, I know what nosy is. We don't talk about anybody but others, right? We love people's misfortune...did you hear so-and-so got caught in an affair with so-and-so. Did you hear what so-and-so did? Did you hear about the money? We talk about everything under the sun because we have nose problems but we don't shine too much.

How much Jesus talk do you have around your table? In the midst of the war proclamations that are going on, in the midst of the things such as our church and human sexuality, in the midst of brokenness in our families and our lives. How much are you talking Jesus? The things he talked about was love and healing and peace and forgiveness and grace and mercy. Do you have any of that left to share? In a few moment we talk, we receive these most precious gifts reminding us that a man on a cross said to the thief and to those who wanted to murder him: Today, I forgive you. Geez...Has anyone ever offended you and you still say: Hell will freeze before I forgive him? Have you ever heard that phrase? Jesus must be saying from the cross: What did you say? I'm forgiving you and I expect you to forgive others, to have grace, to have second chances! We have Good News! That all that Christmas is about...Good News! Salvation for some, no! Salvation for all. Not those who you think you are better than or they...all that kind of judgmental stuff. He says: My gift is here for all the world, whether they look like us, think like us, appear like us, speak like us...I am here to share Good News. I don't know when it was you last though what Jesus changed your life. Oh my Lord, how he's changed my life. Not once, not twice...day after day after day. And that child's song we used to sing: He's still working on me to make me want...oh, He's still working. Unfortunately He's got a lot of work to day with me, I don't know about you.

God is calling us. I saw this writing by Ralph Waldo Emerson: The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.

Well, that's a start. Life with Christ is a lot more than that. You know, if life were only to be happy, boy there are a lot of people in the world who are going to struggle. We struggle happiness and I just saw on TV Americans use 8% more resources than anyone else in the world and we are still struggling for happiness. We travel to places around this globe where people hardly have sufficient food for today let alone anything in a refrigerator or a dry closet. And they live in war. Can you imagine being in Jerusalem and Palestine? Every day you are wondering which way the weapon is going to get you? Can you imagine in Afghanistan if you are bystanders of these wars that go on in the Middle East and in Africa and Asia and other places? And you say: Still be happy, God is with you. Yeah, they are happy because they claim Christ as the happiness, not the stuff of the world. They proclaim the Savior and when I call my friends weekly and say how is it going? By the grace of God we are surviving. When is the last you had to say that? But by God's grace you have something today.

You see, Jesus is more than happy. Jesus is a lot more than that. When this little infant came, he said: I am a transformer. I am the hope of the world. I am the light of the world. I am the changing agent. And if you are really living him, you and I have to be changing agents

and it has to start in our home. And God wants more from us. When Jesus was born he didn't stay that little baby that you want to cuddle. He grew into a man and challenged the people around him to say: I want more. You can't just hate. You have to learn to love. You have to grant mercy and peace and all these gifts to others. What I have for you: No, we can't take time for the children, Jesus and Jesus said: Bring them to me. These people that are blind and these people who are crippled, it's all their fault. Jesus said: No, we are going to go bring some healing this way.

Jesus was trying to teach the disciples a new way. Guess what? We are disciples. He is trying to say to us: What is it that you were born for? What is your destiny for the Kingdom? Who is it that you can represent Christ to? Your spouse, your parents, your children, your neighbors, your friends? We are a mission post. Around us the Christian faith is dissolving because Christians are silent. We talk about everything but Jesus. And the world around us is more lost than ever because they are wondering: Has Jesus really changed your life? Sometimes when they hear our judgement and our criticism and our evil mouth they probably wonder: I certainly don't think you ever met Jesus. And we all have those moments. I'm a pastor and I have those moments. But God wants us to be apologetic for those moments and say: you know what? I wasn't all I could be yesterday or today. Forgive me because I really want to live for Jesus. And when we do, it's those kind of confessions, it's the little things that we do, with whoever God has made you to be, that will allow you to arise and shine and to make a difference with your life.

I don't know what God is calling you to, but if you haven't heard the call you are not listening, I can tell you that. God has a call for every one of us. I was reading stories this week and I came across this gentleman, Eli Herring. Some of you who follow sports would have known him. I'm not a sports fanatic and I didn't know. But in 2009 he was playing for Brigham Young. He was considered the offensive tackle of the year, the most sought after person in the draft, offered millions of dollars. And let me tell you, I never want to have an argument with him. He's 6 foot 7, 360 pounds, roughly. If he hits you you see tomorrow or yesterday real quick. And he said, no I can't play in those leagues because of my faith, because they play on the Sabbath and I will honor the Sabbath. Instead I'll be a math teacher and coach football at my school.

Not everyone is called to make those kind of sacrifices, but it was his call. I don't know what God is calling you today, but I know God is calling you to shine. You've got it. You are equipped. You are prepared. He will never send you anywhere that He doesn't give you everything you need to be the Christian light and witness you need to be. So, pick it up, put on a smile, wear it boldly, be filled with love, be filled with mercy and grace, the things that you want and offer them to those around us.

In just a moment we are going to read, and I invite you to pull out your program and read along with us this Wesley Covenant that we've done year after year, to understand that God has a plan and we are part of it when we give our life, not in part, but in whole to His Kingdom.