

“Being A Light”

1st John 4:18-21

1/2/2000 – Maryvale Drive Presbyterian Church, Philip Siddons

My comments, this morning, are for those of you who have committed yourselves to serve this church as Elders and Deacons. At the same time, what I say is not only to you who lead but to myself and to all of us, because whenever we intentionally commit ourselves to be involved with others, we can be engaged in ministry.

As individuals and as we are joined together, we are gathered as the church for many important reasons. We **celebrate** and **worship** God in gratitude for all of the blessings we have received in life. Together, we learn of our work to be done in our faith and **how** that faith should change the character of all of our relationships. We **support** one another in our times of sorrow. But all of these events on which we focus represent **transitions** in our lives. When we stop to think about it, our lives turn out to be full of transitions.

There’s new life and there’s death. We see transitions in relationships and in careers. We mark changes in sickness and health, in friendship and even in times of loneliness. We have academic accomplishments and failures. There are things we’ve done that could be called brilliant or stupid, naive or wise, ambitious or lazy. Our lives are filled with transitions from start to finish. Everything changes but not so much that life becomes chaotic and without meaning.

You know that because of our transitions, we create rituals to help us make more sense out of all the change. The rituals remind us of beginnings and endings and these rituals help us move through time. So we maintain patterns in how we put the silverware on our tables or how we kiss loved ones hello and goodbye. We wash the car, pet the dog or back up our computer files ritualistically. Our lives are filled with rituals that relate to our life transitions – some being voluntary, others compulsory.

There are Baptisms and confirmations, traffic violation court appearances, weddings, graduations, birthdays, divorces and anniversaries. There are first days at the new job, retirements, block parties and funerals. Churches thrive

on rituals.

Throughout all of our transitions and their accompanying rituals, there is one thing that stays the same. It’s true for you and me and it is true for everyone. Throughout all of our transitions remains what we personally feel about ourselves – our self-concept. The writer Jon Kabat-Zinn puts it succinctly in his book title: ‘Wherever you go, there you are.’ In every moment of our public and private lives, wherever we find ourselves, how we feel about ourselves is right there affecting everything we **do**, everything we **say** and everything about which we **think**.

Right now, we’re in this worship space with its vaulted ceilings. We generally worship in this kind of room with its height and design – just to help us realize that God is bigger than any problem we could ever have. We hope to experience a sense of majesty – that our God is somehow bigger and more spacious than our lives in our kitchens, living rooms, bedrooms and offices.

But just like people in the Middle Ages, (sitting in their magnificent cathedrals), today each of us often feel small and disconnected from God, religion and the all noble ideals we were taught. Despite all that we have – our relationships, our careers, talents, wealth, homes or technology – the most impoverished aspect of our lives is usually what we think of ourselves. You and I have talked about this.

Some people may like to think that this church, the leaders of this church, of this community and of this nation – are, in some way, larger than life. Usually, if we meet someone who is well known in the media, we immediately lose all sense of our own self-worth and feel as if we are in the presence of a ‘god.’ Inside, however, if we think for even a second, we know that this is not the case. Still, no matter what well-known media person it might be, people who encounter them, almost routinely, comment on how surprised they were to find that ‘they were so down to earth.’

From where does this wrong thinking come? Certainly

not the Bible and not history books. It comes from television and movies. Everyone on television, movies and in print live in million dollar homes with unlimited amounts of discretionary money. All the heroes and heroines seem to have brilliant minds and they're charming and entertaining and witty.

We're so conditioned by these unrealistic images and teleplay characters that each one of us wonder if we are, in some ways, 'not good enough.' We are going through our lives usually living in fear that we are not good enough and we often project on to our children that they should be better than who they are. 'If we can't fulfill our dreams, darn it, our kids better!' (*we wrongly think*). Teachers and counselors often have to remind parents, (if they'll listen and if they're open to this learning), to let their kids pursue their own dreams. But in your exchanges with others in this church and beyond, you know that despite the huge gulf between what we're taught we should be and what we really think of ourselves, all of us, in the end, can only do the best we can. We often struggle (and occasionally stagger) through our transitions.

In addition to the pathetic standards we're taught of what is supposed to be 'successful' and 'valued,' our culture is also trying to get us to DO something different. 'You are what you do!' we're told. 'You are what you read' others say. 'What is your net worth?' some might ask. 'What do you have to show for your life?' we're asked.

We're made to think, that if only we possessed this new product, we'd be better off. Even churches subtly teach that we should believe this one essential thing to finally get our life 'right.' We fear that we better be good enough in what we do or someone else, who is better, will replace us. We're driven by a culture and even a religion of doing.

On one level, if you don't do anything, obviously you would not get a pay check or your home would be declared a disaster area. But often we come to feel that we ought to be involved in something that is magnificent or brilliant or, at least, entertaining. Certainly something meaningful. Definitely something religious. Blow them away with a special dessert 'to die for.' Get another degree or software certification. Save the company several thousand dollars with an idea or make a killing on the stock market.

Church professionals are supposed to jump to the front

of the current local parade to build another building or march their kids off to a retreat (that will forever change their lives – a gathering that will finally solidify (for those kids) their parent's values and finally motivate them to be successful and outwardly religious people – clones of their parents). 'Do something!' society and churches insist.

But I quietly suggest that you should stop listening to these dominant voices in our culture. Resist the pressure of our entire culture and the religion in which we find ourselves. Turn away from those who ask you to do the next thing in order to guarantee that your next transition will be 'good enough.'

Instead, listen to the voice within you that says 'You are already good enough.' You are good. You already know that you, me and everyone in this room will never be perfect and none of us are any more perfect than anyone else – despite the elevated positions and the titles people desperately feel they need to perpetuate the myth that some people are really any better than anyone else.

My reminder, this morning, is to stop struggling to DO and instead, concentrate on simply BEING. Keep being who you already are. Make it so that everyone around you can freely and easily be who they already are. Let them be different from who you are. You know there are already enough people in our lives who are so self-absorbed and critical of others who are different – that they couldn't be truly present with you if you tied them down to a tree stump next to everyone else.

Instead, you be present (and at home) with yourself – and that's almost impossible to do if someone hasn't encouraged you to do so. Come to be truly present and at home with yourself – with who you are now. Not who you're going to be or who you hope to be but all that you are now, in the moment.

Then, start being present with the people around you (as far as your time and energies permit). Just be you (independent of who others are), because they need you to show them how you can be at home (in a non-judging way) with them. This is, in practical reality, the unconditional love we see in every encounter Jesus had with others.

When we can come to be accepting, non-judging and open to others (even for the brief times when we share life

with them) they will find that **THEY** can come to be free to be truly present with themselves and those around them. They learn that who they are, as a person, is good enough and noble enough and beautiful enough. They come to learn that they are totally loved by God – just from the way you accept them and are open to them as worthy people whom God has personally made. You will enable yourself (and them) to live without fear.

Imagine, . . . truly living without fear. And in the process, this community will experience the joy embodied in the words: ‘Perfect love casts out all fear.’

This is the ministry to which you have been called. It’s not about **knowing** enough. It’s not about **doing** enough. It’s only about **being** who God already made you to be. When you get that right, your light will shine and truly light up all of life around you. You will make at least a small part of the world safe and without fear. ■