

First Congregational Church of Westfield
"Hearts that Shine"
2 Corinthians 4: 3-6
Rev. Julie G. Olmsted
February 14, 2021

But if our gospel is hidden, it is hidden to those who are lost. The god of this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

There are people in our lives who just seem to shine. We may know them personally; we may have met them once or twice, we may have seen them from afar, like on television or speaking to a large crowd. You may have a family member who shines; my granny and papa shone. My mother in her last years shone. At times I feel I have had a little shining going on, and I have certainly seen you shine from time to time. Today I want to look deeply together at why this little light does so shine. It's not complicated but it's sometimes definitely not easy. Just a few pointers, dear ones, on this Valentine's Day, the day of love, for your consideration. Nothing complex, but nevertheless, easily to forget. Just a reminder, that is why we worship. That is why we come together, to remember, remember, remember. We are forgetting creatures, Beloveds. Like our brother James says in his Book in the New Testament, we are sometimes like those who look in the mirror, walk away and forget what they look like. Our community gatherings are to help us simply remember.

No Agenda but Christ – I like to look good. You like to look good. We all like to look good, not just physically but in every way. We want to cover our you-know-whats. We want to smell like Valentine's roses. So, we make sure we say and do the "right" things, or at least, the things that make us look right. And so, we might not be so generous at times. We might roll our eyes when others speak (inwardly or outwardly). We might be interested in "proving" how good we are. This is not bad, but it can obscure the light, hide the gospel (truth) within us. This is why confession is at the heart of our faith. Confession, not as in, "Oh, I'm so bad, I'm so bad, I'm bad, I'm bad, I'm bad..." No. Confession as in truth-telling. Confession as in, "Hmm, maybe I'm not so right here. Maybe I can move off my position a little bit, relax my point of view, give someone else the benefit of the doubt," and so forth. Maybe I can see this person, not as my enemy, but as someone who is wounded, needs love, and perhaps even someone who God has sent to me.

Forgiveness ad infinitum (or ad nauseum) – Dears, we have to be quick to forgive, eager to overlook, put wrongdoing or annoying habits or hurtful comments behind us. Not that we should let hurtfulness go unacknowledged. Not that anyone can say anything, do anything and get away with it. No. Things have to be brought to the light. Things should be acknowledged, dealt with, and accounted for, but in the light of God's love and justice, in the light of compassionate desire to help not hurt further, no revenge. Revenge is mine, remember the Lord said. That means, I must respond and act always for the sake of the

gospel, for the sake of the truth, for the good and the health of the body (your body, body of Christ, planet body), not from a place of “getting someone back” or even winning. Winning is for losers in this context. Victory is for winners. Victory in love, in beauty and truth. These are the qualities of the Savior. These are the qualities you and I aspire to if we want our hearts to shine.

Escaping the prison of self – When we’re concerned all the time about self-preservation, our vision narrows and we can’t see the big picture. I love the quote by C.S. Lewis: *Humility isn’t thinking less of ourselves; it’s thinking of ourselves less.* Ask God to help you see the bigger picture. If your vision is narrow and stingy, thinking just of yourself and those who agree with you (like all of us at times), maybe go out and look at the sky. Maybe dance around to some music, lift your arms to the creator and think “outside the body.” Who you are is so much more than your fearful and selfish concerns about getting what you deserve in this life. This is the way of the world; it is NOT the way of the Lord. The Way of the Lord is a wider and gentler path, where all are invited and everyone counts. We are not only so much alike, we are of the same body (the same beloved dust); we are connected; we are one. So, when we think small, only concerned about our own survival and our own opinions (which I know are very, very valuable. I have opinions, too. They’re awesome), we obscure the gospel, and our hearts do not shine.

How do we avoid or break through these roadblocks to our hearts shining? Worship in community, every week or almost every week. Dance, move, go out and look up at the sky. If you can, let the sun shine on your face. Give thanks and know that you are a part of it all. Be generous. Think of some way to help someone then go do it. This frees us from that prison of self.

Sing praises, listen to beautiful music, let your soul and body be revived. Think on the words of good hymns, hymns like our first one: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty. Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee...Holy, Holy, Holy, Though the darkness hide thee, though the sinful human eye thy glory may not see... Let me see, Lord, I want to see.... And here’s another favorite, Into my heart, into my heart, Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Come in today, come in to stay, come into my heart Lord Jesus.... Talk it out, pray it out. Live out loud. Let yourself be known and do NOT feel guilty for being human, being sinful. It’s important, friends, to forgive yourself, not in the spirit of getting away with anything, but in the spirit of compassion and a desire to be fully human, fully known to yourself and God, a desire to have your hearts shine. This is our calling. This is our destiny. Let it shine, family of God, let it shine.