

Pastor David's notes for 4/24-25/2010

Pushing Back The Darkness

Refusing Despair

"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion - to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations."

Isaiah 61:1-4

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."

2 Corinthians 4:6-9

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"Refusing Despair"

Despair is a dark destination at the end of a long road:

1. without hope

2. without meaning

3. without power

We refuse despair and turn away from that hopeless, meaningless, powerless place by:

1. reaffirming the truth

2. reconnecting with God

3. rebuilding the ruins

next weekend: Fireman John Santero - "Thankfulness"



CONNECTION QUESTIONS

for personal study & individual reflection,
and small group discussion & comment

“Refusing Despair” - Isaiah 61:1-4; 2 Corinthians 4:4-9;

John 12:44-46; Psalm 107:10-16; Ephesians 2:10-13

1. The Prophet Isaiah foretold the impact of the Messiah’s coming into the world with redemptive words and acts (Isa 61:1-4). Jesus read this passage in the synagogue in Nazareth and proclaimed it “fulfilled” in His ministry (Luke 4:18-21). What does Isaiah 61:1-4 say about how God’s anointed one will reach to the broken and the distant? What promise does he make to those who have “a spirit of despair”?

2. How does a person end up in a despairing place “without hope” (Ephesians 2:12)? What brings someone to such a low point of expectation and experience?

3. We can come to despair in our life circumstances, in our own thoughts and actions, and in our or anyone’s inability to change things. In which of these ways would you most likely have to fight off despair and “deepest gloom” (Psalm 107:14)? Are we only threatened with despair when our circumstances are difficult or hard? Is it possible to know despair even when you have everything you need materially?

4. Paul taught that God has directed His light into the darkness of our lives in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6-9). With this “knowledge of God’s glory” (His loving and redemptive purpose, power and promise for each of our lives) we are able overcome our challenges without being crushed and destroyed by despair. Can you think of difficult times or circumstances when you were kept from be overwhelmed by the presence and grace of God with you? What helped you to know that grace? How did God make His presence known in your hardship?

5. 2 Corinthians 4:6-9 compares our experience of the redemptive plan of God in the brokenness of this life and world with having “treasure in jars of clay”. In the ancient world, people often hid their most valuable treasures in common earthen pots or jars. What helps us recognize the true glory of what God has done for us in His Son even in the midst of all these ‘cracked-pots’? Why is knowing that the “all-surpassing power” is from God and not us such an important truth to affirm?

6. Isaiah 61:4 speaks of the redeemed of the Lord “rebuilding and restoring places long devastated” and Ephesians 2:10 says we are “created in Christ Jesus to do good works”. Why are good works so necessary to refuse despair in our lives and in others? What devastated places can you see Jesus leading you to have a hand in restoring?
