

## REFLECTING THE LIGHT

Starting a new decade prompts us to envision what is ahead..... and to look back—analysing the past ten years.

Our review and perception of the previous decade all depends at what we can or choose to see.

A limited overview may see the past decade as a photo album of how a family has grown and changed. Another may focus on one's own health or ....accomplishments ... or disappointments.

Some may measure the decade in economic terms—whether there was personal prosperity or not. ??

Any view/ analysis is fine; however, I would encourage us to see a bigger picture – to look beyond ourselves.

I believe an educated perspective **and** a Christlike view include other people in the decade picture, too..... which means justice, peace and politics all get stirred into the reflection / evaluation.

My own myopic / narrow view of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century reveals wonderful events – they were good times for me personally. Some examples: I gained a son-in-law, a grandson and many new friends, and....they are Katherine years –she grew from 3 months to 10 years of age. Nevertheless, when I look beyond myself / when I see with illumination, I consider the whole, and the evaluations drops, a lot.

Over the past 10 years, Our planet has not faired so well; we've done very little to curb carbon emissions and our rapid extractions of natural resources. In addition, millions have died from the two major wars being fought Millions have died indirectly because money was spent on war and was not used to fight hunger and disease.... and directly because of the horror of war..... and the reason is because the poor response to the brutal acts of terrorism nine years ago.

The late William Sloan Coffin pointed out in 2003 that we did not have to yield to the temptation to join the terrorists' folly, but we did, ..... and we are paying for it and will pay for it.

The shades for the decade were greed, arrogance and selfishness.... outlined with violence and the financial recession.

I wish I could only look at my own experiences, and limit my world to the reach of my arm. My decade was painted in pastels,.... YET....the Epiphany light prompts me to shift my view from first person to Third person.

Following Christ is a community experience; we see and speak in terms of God, us and others.

With all that in mind, our glance to the next decade is tainted with a sense of foreboding insecurity with darkness and doubt.

Security, global injustices and our planet's health are major concerns.

Nevertheless, today is Epiphany Sunday – the day we remember the wise men who followed the illumination / the star that lead them **Through** Herod and onto Bethlehem.

Epiphany serves as a reminder for us to see NOT only the big picture, including Herod and his brutality, but also to see the hope that is beyond the darkness.

The movement from darkness to light has been the essence of our Advent-Christmas theme. We are becoming “illuminated.”

The theft, a couple of weeks ago, of the Auschwitz death camp sign “Work sets you Free”, reminded me of my visit to the Dachau concentration camp. I told the following story back in 2007, but I think it is appropriate to share again.

On the wall of the museum at the Dachau concentration camp is a large and stunning photograph of a mother and her little girl standing in line for a gas chamber.

The child, who is walking in front of her mother, does not know where she is going. The mother, who walks behind, **does know**, but is helpless to stop the tragedy. In her helplessness she performs the only act of love left to her. She places her hands over her child's eyes so she will at least not see the horror to come.

When people enter into the museum they do not whisk by this photo hurriedly. They pause. They almost feel the pain.

And, deep inside, I think that they are all saying, “O God, don't let that be all that there is.”

Some respond to the photo with a sense of hopelessness.

Some respond with anger and a resolve to act in God's behalf to do judgment / to do redemptive violence,..... and they mean well.

Another response is to see the Epiphany of the moment: that life is bigger than we are; that God is all that we have,..... and that in spite of the darkness and evil..... God **must BE** in the world.

God **MUST** be in the world. God is present,.....if we can only see beyond the darkness,..... if only there was enough light.

The Prophet Jeremiah tried to bring that awareness to his people, exiled in Babylon.

The Jeremiah 31 passage is an optimistic prophesy, full of hope.

It is a vision of God doing wonderful things.

You just gotta love Jeremiah, even though his prophecy is a little scandalous; it is, nevertheless full of joy and excitement.

He envisions young women dancing and young and old men full of delight.  
*? Who would dare predict that to happen in a Mennonite Church?*

Jeremiah also envisions:

sorrow and mourning turning to gladness and joy, and all the people being satisfied – content.  
And, to top that off, he predicts in verse 14 that there will be fat and sassy priests!  
Fat priests / pastors.... How about that? It doesn't get any better!!

I wonder how the people in exile responded to the optimistic prophecy?  
Exiled people / people out in the dark cold, away from home truly do need hope, and not pipe dreams.

*It seems to me that most of the Christian churches are in a state of exile, although we haven't quite realized it.*

Sure, there's still lots of folks who go to church, and lots more who claim some kind of Christian faith. But, if we talk of genuine faith that moves us, shapes us and fills us with a vision and hope, then we're talking about a very small minority.

Has Christianity lost its "rawness" and its vision?  
Have we become a flavour that is a part of our secular culture?  
Have we become the centre of our religion?  
Do we desire stability and comfort more than movement and change?

/////

The beginning of John's Gospel presents a different image and the passage should give us goose bumps.

"The Word became flesh...": Our whole faith hinges on those words.

Presented here is the utterly impossible idea that **God comes to us** in a body that is just like our human body, and experiences all those things that we experience, and is not some pretend super-hero who flies around saving some and zapping others.

This is God who knows what fear and failure are like; who knows how hard it is to turn the gospel of love into real life.

Jesus is God's beam of light, that was always there, but now present in a unique and personal manner, a manner that we can understand and relate to.

John gives a grand overview of what God was doing, and then quickly gives us a model.

Listen again to verses 6-9.

"There was a man, sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light {John did NOT do the redeeming,} .... continuing, ...but he came to testify to the light {to reflect the light}.

The true light, which ENLIGHTENS everyone, was coming into the world – **has come** / Is present in the world.”

John the Baptist is not the only example for us. There are many others.

The New Testament teaches that we are called to follow Christ and to bear witness – To “Reflect” the light..... which is God’s love, best understood through Jesus.

*The light takes away the darkness. The light takes Our darkness, AND that is only the beginning.* Enlightenment, as John called it, Salvation as Paul describes it, is ONLY the beginning. It is only the beginning!!!!

We are people who are no longer in the dark.  
We are called to be people who reflect the light into the darkness.

Paul states a similar message in Ephesians 1:3-14, where he encourages us to bask in God’s grace because God is at work in the world.  
It is God’s work.

Therefore, We Do NOT carry the burden to change the world. Changing humans: that’s God’s job, and **God is** in the world doing just that. The light is in the world, ... and All we have to do is reflect it / share it / ..... bask in it.

We are called to be people of faith and hope, children of God as Christ modelled for us. We are people who reflect God’s light all around us?

And, what exactly does that mean? ??????  
What does that mean in the big picture?  
What does that mean for us today?  
??????????

Well..... that is God’s will for you and me. It is our vision / our mission..... our passion.

For the shepherds, it meant going back to work and telling everyone what they had experienced.

For the wise men it meant seeing and honouring Jesus, and then going home by another way.

For Mary and Joseph it meant fleeing to a safer country and waiting, for a while.

No matter what the circumstances are, fleeing from Russia or living in Osler, Saskatchewan, we are called to be people of faith.....with mirrors,..... reflecting the light. In addition, we carry hope in our pocket, and we freely share it.

So what’s the big deal, .... we’ve all heard this stuff before? ?????  
????????????????

It IS a big deal, because all too often, we either focus only on our selves and on the threats to ourselves – the bad and evil, ....and then we lose perspective!

When the past and the future promises are only about our selves then we lose perspective – we can't really see.

Life becomes bleak and unsafe. We lose our peace and the sense that God is at work. We become fearful and mean, and then we **are tempted to make the darkness safe.**

**///We are tempted to make the darkness safe.....** and that thinking is the antithesis of the Gospel message.

There is darkness, danger and evil in the world, but there is also beauty and light!

For example:

This past week, there was a room in our basement that if I were to walk into it IN total darkness, I would likely trip on something and then fall on something that could really hurt me.

In the dark, this room was very dangerous.

However, the smallest light would reveal that the room was Sasha's, my grandson's, play area in the basement. The floor was covered with all sort of things and toys.

The DANGER is in the darkness!!

In John analogy the darkness is the evil. He is not suggesting that something evil is lurking in the darkness. The darkness represents evil. And, John cogently points out that light always removes the darkness!

God's love and grace always prevails over evil...when there is light!

We are people of the light because we reflect the light.

This is not to say that we ignore and pretend the darkness doesn't exist. There is a lot of evil and ugliness in the world. But, there is also a lot of goodness and love, too.

And, ours is NOT to mould the evil. We do NOT save the world.

Instead we are people of the light! \*\*We help illuminate by reflecting the Grace of God.

God does the rest.

WE take our cue from Christ..... trusting God.

We need to remind ourselves of this. I need to remind myself of this!

The light is more powerful than the darkness. God's love is enough. God is IN the world, and all we have to do is hold the mirror and expose the darkness! God will do the rest.

I've learned that the most important light in my home is not a bright ceiling light. It is the little night light..... because it keeps me from stubbing my toe or stepping on a wayward toy.

Little things can make a big difference:

A small word of encouragement can change a life.

A little smile can sooth a troubled soul.

A positive word can bring hope and a second chance.

An act of kindness can inspire and uplift someone in despair.

Looking beyond ourselves and sharing our vision can be illuminating.

Adding light to what our nation is doing can cause a shift away from darkness.

If the German churches mixed the Gospel message of Grace and justice with their country's political tilt,.... I think the holocaust could have been prevented.

A church in a small Saskatchewan town can reflect the light / give illumination into the darkness, ..... and only God knows what will come of it and who will learn to see more clearly.

We are beginning a new year and a new decade.

The duration of the day's daylight is getting longer, and in spite of the cold and bleakness.....and in spite of ourselves..... God is at work.

God is giving us a vision of hope.

We don't make the darkness safe.

But, we do get to dance and be filled with JOY.

And, some of us get to be fat and sassy..... ..okay,... I added the sassy part.

Grace to all. We are NOT alone.

We are not of the dark.