

RELIGION

Christ our power source for lighting the world

It is hard to believe the advent season is here. Perhaps you have noticed an influx of people putting up lights on their home, around trees, and in their yard. I love all the lights at Christmas because it reminds me of the second part of Jesus' call to believers in Matthew chapter five. His call is for us to be the light of the world.

As Matthew 5:14-16 says, you are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a candle, and put it under a basket, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father



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which is in heaven. We need to understand the responsibility of letting our light shine. First, we are called to come to The Light because the source of our light is not ourselves. Jesus is the source of the light we shine. John 3:19 reminds us that The Light, Jesus, has come into the world. He is the source; we are the reflectors.

Next, we are called to receive His light. It is not enough to merely know about the light of Christ;

we must choose and respond to the light of Christ. John 1:12 reminds us that as many as receive Christ, to them He gave the right to become children of God and reflect His glory in the world. Third, once we have received the light, then we are called to walk in the light. Paul instructs in Ephesians 5:8 that Christ-followers no longer walk in darkness; we now walk in the light of Christ — walking as children of light.

Finally, we are called to reflect the light. In the same way that the moon reflects the sun's light, Christians must reflect the light of The Son. The responsibility of Jesus' call can be summarized like this: choose The Light if you are in darkness. If you have expe-

rienced salvation, then go, make a difference in the darkness.

A young friend of mine once took a glow-in-the-dark object into a dark room. He was excited to see the object glow, but it did not. My young friend placed the object in the light and read the imprint on the side: "Want me to shine in the darkness? Keep me exposed to light!" Friends, if you want your life to shine for God, you must keep yourself exposed to The Light. It is your choice to stay exposed to The Light.

Just like Christmas lights need electricity to produce brilliance, Christ-followers need Christ — we "plug-in" to His power. If we never connect with our power source, we will never deliver the

brilliant glow He created us to deliver. Christians must stay in the light to reflect the light. Christians must regularly connect with our Savior if we are going to impact this world with The Light.

This season, take time to enjoy the lights that illuminate our holidays. Take time to consider Jesus' call for us to be the light of the world and then illuminate the darkness with all the hope, joy, love and peace that can only come from Christ working through our lives. Go light the world.

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Having God's grace vital, seeing we have it even more so

"Amazing Grace" is certainly a hymn we have all heard many times, and probably sung as well. But exactly what is "amazing" about grace?

This is not a word we use much in everyday life unless it is a blessing over a meal. The truth is that it is at the very heart of the Christian faith. It has more to do with how God sees us than how we see ourselves. Years ago, when Apollo 11 landed on the moon, some of the most incredible and remarkable pictures of the earth were shared with the world. I don't think we expected what a difference that perspective would make in how we saw the earth. From that point forward, we saw it as staggeringly beautiful.

In one sense, the moon landing opened our eyes to perceive our world with



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new insight, new respect, and awe. We were given the privilege of standing, in a way, in the shoes of God after the Creation and being able to echo those words of complete affirmation when in Genesis, "God saw what he had created and behold, it was good."

This, to me, is a wonderful image of grace. Grace shows us what, under normal circumstances, from our limited human point of view, we cannot see — that you and I are also God's creation. Therefore, we are beautiful, we are lovely, and that in God's eyes, we are very good. Not good as a moral attribute, but as an inherent quality that for-

ever belongs to us by right of our being intentionally molded by the hands of the Creator.

The pervasive and subtle power of sin tempts us to see the very worst in other people and in ourselves. It causes us to focus on all of the bad things in the world and to expect the worst. Grace invites us to take a deep breath, step back, and to look for the good and the beautiful in the world and in the world's people.

This is not an easy thing to do as we have been conditioned to focus on the obvious and to believe that is reality. Grace encourages us to develop new vision that sees beneath the surface and recognizes that God's goodness is woven throughout all of his Creation.

The problem of grace, then, is not primarily one of whether or not we have

the child stumbles along, making one mistake after the other, the parent says over and over again, "very good... that is very good..." So it is with God's grace whispering in our ears as we do our sinful and imperfect best to be the people we are called to be. As you and I often blunder our way through life, if we listen carefully we will hear a quiet and consistent voice say, "very good ... that is very good..." The hymn goes on to say, "I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see..."

God's grace is like the loving parent teaching a child to walk or to ride a bike, or to play a sport. As

the child stumbles along, making one mistake after the other, the parent says over and over again, "very good... that is very good..."

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God will rescue you, too

In Joshua 2:1-3, we learn that "Joshua secretly sent out two spies from the Israelite camp at Acacia Grove. He instructed them, 'Scout out the land on the other side of the Jordan River, especially around Jericho.' So the two men set out and came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there that night. But someone told the king of Jericho, 'Some Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.' So the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab: 'Bring out the men who have come into your house, for they have come here to spy out the whole land.'"

But Rahab didn't give them up; instead, she hid them under bundles of flax on the roof. She made a pact with them that she would protect them if they would assure her that she and her family were spared the destruction of Jericho.

Just try to get a visual of the walls of Jericho that protected those within. Now focus on God's people, circling the wall, sounding their musical instruments, shouting in a loud clamor. Then, at the appointed time, God's strategy took over, and the wall was felled.

In Joshua 6:22-23, we learn that "Joshua said to the two spies, 'Keep your promise. Go to the prostitute's house and bring her out, along with all her family.' The men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, mother, brothers, and all the other relatives who were with her. They moved her whole family to a safe place near the camp of Israel."

Rahab and her family were removed, the town and everything were burned, and God gave Israel the victory. Rescued they were!

Moving forward, let's look at some others who were rescued. Namely, they were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego — three young Hebrew men who refused to bow down to the king's golden image, which was 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide. Well, not these three! When the musical instruments sounded, all were ordered to bow down in the worship of this idol.

Nebuchadnezzar was so furious that he had the three men thrown into a fiery furnace, which he commanded be heated up seven times hotter than usual. "And because the king, in his anger, had demanded such a hot fire in the furnace," Daniel 3:22 tells us "the flames killed the soldiers as they threw in the three men."

Daniel 3:23-25 continues: "So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, securely tied, fell into the roaring flames. But suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar jumped



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up in amazement and exclaimed to the advisers, 'Didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?' 'Yes, Your Majesty, we certainly did,' they replied. 'Look! Nebuchadnezzar shouted, 'I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a

god!" Nebuchadnezzar called the three men out of the furnace and praised their God. He made a decree that all his kingdom would worship the true God, our Heavenly Father, from that day forward. Not only were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego rescued but so was a nation of people.

There are many reports of rescues in the Bible: Noah and the flood; Daniel from the lion's den; Jonah from the whale's belly; and others. Just read Isaiah 43 to understand God's love and promised protection for his chosen people. He will protect and rescue any one of us as well; all we have to do is ask. However, we must move forward and not look back.

Most times as humans, we need to be rescued from situations we have created ourselves. Your rescue may involve a person, place or thing. Frequently, it is a person or circumstance from which we are rescued. Take heart! God is with you! These rescues may seem small and mundane when compared to those of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, these rescues free you from whatsoever.

There may be the same suspense and danger of escape in your encounter. We are bombarded with a massive need to escape from the one individual trying to keep us from being rescued: Satan! Do not allow the devil a foothold! Celebrate your liberation and never look back! Any rescue is monumental, regardless of the cause.

Lord, you know how to rescue us completely and effectively. Your word assures us rescue is possible for each of us. Take these demons Lord, whatever they may be, from our minds, bodies, and souls. Return us to the peace we can know only through You. Cleanse us, Lord, in every way. We ask Your forgiveness for our discretions. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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The Second Sunday of Advent: Peace

The word "Advent" means coming or arrival. The Advent celebration is both a commemoration of Christ's first coming and anticipation of His second coming when Christ will bring the fullness of God's kingdom. The season of Advent challenges us to fulfill John the Baptist's exhortation: "Prepare the way for the Lord" (Matthew 3:3). John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. He pointed others to Christ and he lived for the sake of Christ. Let us do the same this Advent season. Let's each set aside some quiet time for prayer, meditation, and spiritual recommitment. Let's think about those things that steer us in the wrong direction, and let's renew our commitment to know Christ and make Him known to others.

On the second Sunday of Advent, December 5, the theme is peace. The angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:14). The prophet Isaiah called Jesus "The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). In Isaiah's day, the term "prince" meant exclusive owner. We need to go to Jesus if we want to have peace in our lives. Peace is not secured through gifted political or religious leaders. It does not come from a husband or a wife. Peace does not come through the ownership of things. Jesus alone is the source of peace.

Jesus brings peace: spiritual peace, peace of heart and mind, relational peace, and some day He will also bring peace among nations. He is indeed the Prince of Peace. This Christmas, don't allow the busyness of the season to shift your focus from Christ. Let Him be your Prince of Peace in every situation. Think also about those who do not know Jesus. They need to get ready for Christ's second coming. Our job is to point them to Christ. "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9).

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