

DO NOT LET THE LIGHT BE DIMINISHED!

If you haven't done so already, I want you to find Dennis Smith's sermon in your presbytery packet. If you haven't done so already, please read it before you go to bed this evening!

Dennis was our mission speaker during the season of mission interpretation known as Mission Challenge '07. Dennis has been a mission worker in Guatemala since 1977. He has seen first-hand the religious, social and political revolutions so prevalent in Latin America. Rather than becoming bitter about the many ways in which he and others have failed to live up to the God-inspired hope which is given to each of us, Dennis continues to preach a message of peace, justice, and hope to a people and a world which desperately needs such a message.

Dennis was our preacher in worship at Committee Day in October. We received the "Readers Digest" version of the sermon he sent us to include in our packet, a sermon preached in its entirety at Southminster Church the next day. But, even in the abridged version, I was struck by his ability to paint pictures for our minds to see. He spoke softly, yet passionately about seeing the "faces of God" - in a simple act of hospitality, in a woman who chose not to seek revenge, in a pastor who was not bound or defined by the trials and tribulations of his past.

Through it all, I heard a clear and compelling challenge: "Do not let the image of God within you be diminished!" In this season of holiday madness, is the image of God within you clear to those whom you meet? In your office or school or home, is Christ heard more clearly than the whimpers of self-pity? At the end of a week or month or year, can you look back and declare without doubt that your life has been defined by your relationship with your God more than the obstacles placed in your way?

My message this morning will not be long - but I hope it does not fade quickly. I challenge you to make it clear to yourself, your family, your co-workers, and the world around you that within each of us is the face of God, waiting to be seen by others. Especially as the days get shorter and more hectic as we approach the holidays, who around you needs to see the face of God, the face of hope? Have they heard that message of hope from you?

John Ortberg once said, "For many of us the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it." And I would add that when that happens, the Light of the World is dimmed a little more.

I have a framed poem hung on my office door to remind me every day that we do not need grand accomplishments to make a difference. All we need to do is to bring a little light into the corners of the world we travel each day. The poem is by Ralph Waldo Emerson:

To laugh often and much;
To win the respect of intelligent people
and the affection of children;
To earn the appreciation of honest critics
and endure the betrayal of false friends;

To appreciate beauty,
 to find the best in others;
To leave the world a bit better,
 whether by a healthy child, a garden patch,
 or a redeemed social condition;
To know even one life has breathed easier
 because you have lived.
This is to have succeeded.

That is my charge to you this day - to bring a little of the Light of the World to those around you every day. In so doing, may others see the face of God in the faces of God's servants sent into the world with a word of hope. Do not let that light be diminished!

Gregory J. Coulter
General Presbyter
Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery
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