

“This Can Only Be Seen By the Eyes of the Blind”

Christmas Eve – 2010

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Have you ever made a wrong turn? Anyone who has ever driven a car has made a wrong turn. Chances are, however, none of us have made the kind of wrong turn William and Tammy Forsythe recently made on a rainy night in Everett, Washington. William and his wife were on their way to meet their son for dinner at Lombardi’s Restaurant along the Everett Marina. On their way to the restaurant William made a wrong turn onto the 10th street boat ramp. The rain was pouring, it was dark and the area was not well lit.

Down the boat ramp William and Tammy rolled, all the while thinking they were entering the parking lot of Lombardi’s Restaurant. William said, “*A splash came up and I thought, even then, it was a puddle. Before I knew it we were already floating.*” They were not only floating...they were sinking and Tammy couldn’t swim. By the time the water was up to the couple’s shoulders they received a phone call (*let’s hear it for cell phones*) from their son who had become alarmed at his parents’ tardiness. William told his son, “*Get help and come over here quick...we’re in the water!*”

Their son, Jon, jumped in his SUV and sped to the boat ramp. In his excitement, Jon drove down the same boat ramp and, you guessed it, ended up in the water. As they say, “*Like father like son!*” Before he knew it, his SUV was sinking alongside his parents’ van. But Jon quickly escaped from his car and swam to his parents’ van which was almost completely submerged. Jon broke out the back window and, somehow, managed to pull his parents’ to safety. William and Tammy credit their son with saving their lives. William later commented, “*I can’t believe how it all came together just right. Someone was looking down on us. Next time it rains, maybe I’ll stay home.*” (The Port of Everett says they are examining the boat launch to determine if any new safety precautions need to be taken)

(www.msnbe.msn.com/id/40597461/ns/local_news-Seattle_wa/ 12/9/10 by Jake Whittenberg)

Now that’s making a wrong turn! We’ve all been there done that....maybe not ending in the water but we’ve all made wrong turns!

In fact, at times it seems like the world has made a wrong turn and is sinking into utter darkness. Every day we are reminded of an endless war and corrupt government in Afghanistan, the ubiquitous concern of terrorist attacks, the numbing uncertainty of a sputtering economy, a growing number of foreclosures and the seemingly endless reports of shootings, murders, suicides, embezzlements, and home invasions. It seems that somewhere along the way the world made a wrong turn and it looks awfully dark out there.

But, as we gather on this beautiful Christmas Eve, most of us aren't thinking about the world although I hope we are thinking our country's military personnel and offering prayers for them. We simply want to enjoy a nice Christmas event with friends and family. However, even in this festive environment with glorious music, beautiful poinsettias and a touching story about a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes some, perhaps many, can't shake the gnawing sense that you have made a wrong turn or a wrong turn has been forced upon you. Some are facing an empty chair and an empty heart as you gather around your dinner table. Some are facing impossible dilemmas as you seek to sort out issues at work, at home, at school, in personal relationships, finance and health. At times it seems that life comes at us with a built in catch-22.

When we are stressed, or fearful, and many are during these difficult times, we can easily make the wrong turn down the ramp of cynicism, depression, anger, isolation, or even violence that lead us straight into the cold, dark water. Christmas is supposed to be the most joyous time of the year but, for some, the reality doesn't even come close to the high expectations. There may be some here this Christmas Eve whose mind and heart are so blinded by the darkness that the thought of seeing the Christmas Light and receiving hope through that Light seems like an impossible dream.

That great American theologian, *Billy Joel*, speaks for those who have made a wrong turn in his song "*River of Dreams*." Maybe you will find yourself in these lyrics...

In the middle of the night
I go walking in my sleep
From the mountains of faith
To a river so deep

I must be looking for something
 Something sacred I lost
 But the river is wide
 And it's too hard to cross

And even though I know the river is wide
 I walk down every evening and I stand on the shore
 And try to cross to the opposite side
So I can finally find out what I've been looking for

In the middle of the night
 I go walking in my sleep
Through the valley of fear
To a river so deep

And I've been searching for something
Taken out of my soul
 Something I would never lose
 Something somebody stole

I don't know why I go walking at night
 But now I'm tired and I don't want to walk anymore
I hope it doesn't take the rest of my life
Until I find what it is that I've been looking for

In the middle of the night
 I go walking in my sleep
Through the jungle of doubt
 To a river so deep

I know I'm searching for something
Something so undefined
That it can only be seen
By the eyes of the blind

Billy Joel sings the truth when he sings of an instinctive yearning deep with each of us, to search for something that will ultimately satisfy. And he is also right on when he sings that our deepest longing “*can only be seen by the eyes of the blind.*” Ultimately we discern our deepest longing through the eyes of faith, that sixth sense that recognizes the reality of the Spirit. We humans easily fixate on the stuff of this world. And, no matter how good the things of this world might be, they can not satisfy the deepest longings of our soul. Billy Joel sings the truth....that for which we yearn can only be seen through the eyes of the blind.

The Christmas story in the Gospel of John does not introduce Jesus as a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes but introduces the reality of God's presence as the Light. This Light can only be seen through the eyes of faith.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John1:1-5)

No matter how dark the darkness is, God's Light shines brighter and that Light is seen through the eyes of faith. I pray we will all see the Light through some aspect of tonight's worship. Be assured, however, that God's Light is not confined to the sanctuary or church gatherings. God's Light is shining right where you live....at work, at home, at school, at the mall, through the beauty of nature, music or art...God's Light shines in the ordinary and extraordinary happenings of human life. Many of you have seen the YouTube video of the Hallelujah Chorus being spontaneously sung during lunch hour at a common food court in a mall. I see God's Light shining through those singers. *Where have you recently seen God's Light? What or who reveals God's Light to you?*

Some of you may remember my Christmas Eve sermon in 2003 during which I announced the birth of our first grandchild. I stated in that Christmas Eve sermon, ***"Annabelle Olivia Merten came into our world and it looks like our world will never be the same. It's amazing the impact a 7 pound 10 ounce baby can have..... After this worship service Connie, our son, Ben, and I will hop in the car and drive through the night to Wichita, Kansas, just so we can see and hold Annabelle. Yes, it's amazing what the birth of a grandchild does to normally sane individuals....Allow me to state the obvious...all of the gifts under the tree pale in comparison to Annabelle. And I dare say that all the gifts under your trees pale in comparison to the Annabelle's of your lives."***

As I share my joy and love for Annabelle and her brother Elliott, I know I speak for every great-grandparent, grandparent, parent, aunt, uncle, big sister and big brother who have held your new born. (*Mentioned Diller, Mile, and Ludwig families*) When we hold a new born baby we might have a glimpse of God's plan to come to us, not as a conquering warrior, but as a baby born in the most humble circumstances. By all rationale this was a very strange way to introduce the Light to the world. But when we think of the innocence, purity and beauty of our new born babies we realize it's not so strange after all. God does not come to us through intimidation nor does God overpower us. God's Light is first revealed as a baby born in a manger.

Long ago there were shepherds watching over their sheep by night. These shepherds were most certainly living under a pall of darkness. In a recent sermon, Denise described the unenviable predicament of shepherds in Jesus' day. Denise stated, ***"The Bethlehem shepherds were grim, hard men not very likely to have any real joy in their lives. They were not respected, not allowed to testify in court, marginalized in their society. Their days were spent searching for enough grass to feed their sheep in a country known for rocky soil, not lush pastures.....It is easy to imagine they were discouraged, without any hope things could be different without any hope of finding real joy."***

In their pensive moments under the dark sky they no doubt wondered when or how they had taken such a wrong turn to end up as a lowly shepherd. But they would soon learn that God's Light shines brightest when we have taken wrong turns and we are sinking into the murky waters of darkness. God is a God of surprises and, as those Shepherds watched their sheep that night, they received the surprise of their lives.

"...an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:9-12)

I love Luke's use of that little, three-letter word... "you!" *Bringing you good news* How many need good news tonight?*to you is born a Savior* How many need a Savior tonight?*a sign for you* How many need a sign tonight?*you will find a child.* How many need to see and find the Light tonight?

On this Christmas Eve the good news is that no matter what wrong turns we have taken and no matter how dark the darkness seems, God's Light always...always shines brighter....*for you....you....you....me and all of us!* May we all have eyes to see the Light of Jesus Christ!

Amen