

Series: Rethinking Church

Today: Tiffany Windows

Text: Ephesians 4:17-31

A Sermon preached by the Rev. Randolph T. Riggs, D.Min.

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First Presbyterian Church of Lancaster, PA

One of the joys of working in the place where I worship is the opportunity to walk into this Sanctuary at any time during the day and allow the architecture to speak a message into my often hectic life. There is something about this place that grounds me in the midst of a busy schedule. I am calmed by a structure that is 158 years old. It reminds me that people of faith have been gathering here for many generations, and those people of faith have built structures that last.

Sitting in this sanctuary reminds me that I am not the first one to discover the grace of God in the life of this community, nor will I be the last. The strong pillars in the front of our sanctuary remind me of the strength of God and the strength I draw from living in community with other brothers and sisters in Christ. The Celtic cross which was brought from Scotland as a worship focus reminds me of the grace of God in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. However, it is the beauty of the stained glass windows which truly calm me and help me to focus on things that are eternal.

Nine of the twelve windows in the Sanctuary were made in the studio of Louis Comfort Tiffany. He was the son of the founder of Tiffany and Company Jewelry Store on Fifth Avenue in New York City, and he was an artist before he became famous for his stained glass. His technique is unique among all other stained glass makers, and it makes his windows extremely valuable; so valuable that we could never afford to replace them. The technique he developed is

in the layering of the glass. It is called “favrile;” some call it opalescent glass, and it is the opalescence which gives his glass its unique quality.

According to Rick Prigg, who restores Tiffany windows, the special thing about Tiffany windows is the way they deal the light. They read on the surface with reflected light, and because of the rich layering technique the light is diffused throughout the glass so it does not just let the light shine through it. It takes the light that hits it and transmits it throughout the pane which gives the rich texture to the window. When the light of the sun hits the outside pane of glass, it reads it, but as it hits the layers of glass, the window also transmits it.

I would like you to hold on to that image as we turn again to Paul in the fourth chapter of Ephesians: reflected light and transmitted light.

Reflected Light

In the second half of Ephesians 4, Paul gets very practical about the way in those of us who are disciples of Jesus Christ are to reflect the Gospel. There is an imperative here: if we have invited Jesus Christ to be part of our lives, then our lives should reflect the life of Christ. *You must no longer live as the Gentiles live; in the futility of their minds (4:17).* We are not to live as if we do not understand the grace of God in Jesus Christ. If anything in our lives does not reflect the life of Christ, we need to do our best to change our behavior so it does. As the light of Christ shines through us, our lives should reflect the life of Jesus.

Last weekend I officiated at the wedding of Amber DePrefontaine and Derek Lineberry. They had chosen another passage from Paul as one of their readings. In Colossians 3:17 it says: *Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God the Father through him.* So I said to the Derek, “*If you cannot imagine Jesus treating Amber the way you are treating Amber, you are on the wrong path.*” And I said to Amber, “*If*

you cannot imagine Jesus treating Derek the way you are treating Derek, you are on the wrong path.” If there is anything in our lives which does not reflect the love of Jesus, we are on the wrong path.

Paul says that before the Gentiles had received Christ, they didn't know any better, but now that they have been baptized and become a part of the body of Christ, they do know better. They are to put away the former way of life and adopt a new way of life that reflects the life of Christ. When we become part of the church, we become part of the body of Christ; and when we are part of the body of Christ; our lives need to show forth the love of Christ.

Some of you have read or heard the author Kathleen Norris. She says she was surprised by this revelation when she joined a Presbyterian church on a bitterly cold January day. She wondered if she was making a serious mistake, since she still felt like an outsider to the church and wondered if she always would. And yet, she knew that somehow, in ways she did not yet understand that making this commitment was something that she needed to do.

So before the church service where she was to join the church, she and the other new members gathered with some of the elders. One elder was a man that she had never liked much. He was a gossip and always seemed ill-tempered. He was not the kind of person one would hold up as possessing Christian virtue.

Anyway, the minister had asked this elder to greet the new members, and standing awkwardly before the small group he cleared his throat and mumbled, “I'd like to welcome you to the body of Christ.”

Kathleen Norris reports that the minister's mouth dropped open, as did hers. Neither of them had ever heard words remotely like this come from the elder's mouth. “Like distant thunder, the words made me more alert,” writes Norris. “My own small mind had just been

jolted, and the world seemed larger, opened in a new way.” The elder’s words — those few, simple words of welcome — had power. They were the truth of God, reflecting through an often ill-tempered elder and she believes that those words called her to a new way of life.

When we become a part of the body of Christ, there is an expectation that we are to have a change in the way we behave in the world so that what comes through us reflects the love of Jesus Christ. This is the reflected light of the Gospel.

Transmitted Light

However, there is more than the reflected light of the Gospel. There is also the light of the Gospel that is transmitted through us as it hits the different layers of our lives. There is more to it than just doing what Jesus would do. It is allowing Jesus to come into our lives and change the way we view the world. The gospel is more than salvation. It is meant to be transformation. That means that we allow God to take our unique gifts and talents and abilities and speak through them.

We don’t have to go out and seek a new job; unless the job we have is a hindrance to us in expressing God’s love and compassion for the world in which we live. We don’t have to go out and learn a new skill; unless we don’t have any skills to demonstrate the love of God in our lives. We just have to allow God use the gifts and talents and abilities God has already give us to transmit the love of Christ to someone else.

However, even more important, we have to let God change us from the inside out. It is here that Paul gives a laundry list of things that a true relationship with Jesus Christ will change. If we have our identity in telling lies about others, we have to learn how to speak the truth. If we have made our living in a dishonest way, we may have been industrious, but we have to find a new way to make a living.

And if you really want to know what God wants you to work on, you can start with Paul's checklist. Stop majoring in the minors when it comes to sin, start working on the things we do every day: bitterness and wrath, anger and wrangling and slander. Instead, we can start learning how to be kind to one another, tender hearted, and learn how to practice forgiveness in our lives.

Many of us have been influenced by the writings of Eugene Peterson and his translation of the Bible called *The Message*. He tells the story of a woman named Judith, who was a member of his church. Judith was woman who had an alcoholic husband and a drug-addicted son. She kept her life and her family together for years by attending twelve-step meetings. One Sunday, when she was about forty years old at the time, she entered the church where Peterson was the pastor. She came at the invitation of some friends she knew from her one of her 12 step meetings—"You need to come to church. I'll meet you there." [By the way, that is still the most effective form of evangelism—when each of us commits ourselves to introduce one other person in our lives to the body of Christ which we love.]

Judith had never been to church before. She knew nothing about church She was well read in poetry and politics and psychology, and knew a great deal of art and artists. But she had never read the Bible Something, though, caught her attention when she entered this church, and she continued to come. In a few months she committed her life to follow Jesus Christ, and Peterson became her pastor.

He loved observing and listening to her. Everything was new: Scriptures, worship, prayer, baptism, Eucharist—church! ... [She was so excited]: "Where have I been all my life? These are incredible stories—why didn't anyone tell me these? How come this has been going on all around me and I never knew it!" ...

When Eugene Peterson moved across the country, the woman continued to stay in touch through email, and he shares one that had profound meaning for him when it comes to the transformation each of our lives needs:

Dear Pastor: Among my artist friends I feel so defensive about my life—I mean about going to church. They have no idea of what I am doing and act bewildered. So I try to be unobtrusive about it. But as my church life takes on more and more importance—it is essential now to my survival—it is hard to shield it from my friends. I feel protective of it, not wanting it to be dismissed or minimized or trivialized.

A long-time secular friend, and a superb artist, just the other day was appalled: "You, Judith, you going to Haiti with a church group! What has gotten into you?" My friends would accept me far more readily if they found that I was in some bizarre cult involving exotic and strange activities like black magic or experiments with levitation.

However, going to church branded me with a terrible ordinariness, but that is what endears it to me, the church and the twelve-step programs, this façade of ordinariness. When you pull back the veil of ordinariness, you find the most extraordinary life behind it.

We do not have to do anything extraordinary with our lives. We simply need to make ourselves open to the possibility that God wants to use us to share the good news of Jesus to the world around us.

Conclusion

Friends, we are called to be reflections of the light of Christ as well as transmitters of the light of Christ. We are to take on the character of Christ in our daily lives and allow that character to shape the unique gifts we bring so that as Christ's light shines through us, it takes on a different texture and hue and enriches the lives of others. May we commit ourselves to that?