

Sermon, December 27, 2020

Ephesians 4:26-32 “Navigating Darkness”

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Good morning!

I think that you all would agree that:

This year.... has been.... a.... Year. Hasn't it?

2020 wasn't anything any of us probably expected. Life has been so incredibly different for all of us. However, not including today, we only have 4 days left of 2020. I'm sure a lot of us are happy to see 2020 go. Although, COVID-19 has challenged us, living through this global pandemic has given us the opportunity to realize how fast and extreme life can change in such a short time. It also gives us the opportunity to reflect on how we respond to a crisis.

COVID-19 has affected many of us in different ways. For some people, this year has been the darkest time of their lives. We have had to deal with feelings of isolation. Many of us have not been able to see family and friends in order to protect each other from the virus. There have been countless hardships we have had to navigate. The deaths of friends and family, loss of income, loss of jobs, and the loss of the normal activities that we had come to take for granted. For me, those normal activities include things like

having my friends over for bonfires, visiting family, and going to school Never again will I take for granted the spontaneous adventures of my friends and I, along with the three hour car rides to see family

Reminiscing through all of these things, can take us to a dark place. Although it can seem, especially in these times, that there is only darkness and no hope of the sense of normalcy that we long for, there is still hope. There is the light of God waiting to be seen. I have found that in the darkness, it is always easier to see the light of God. I know there is the light of God when we are in the thick of the darkness because I have experienced it.

I want to share with you all about my experience finding the light of God for the first time in my life.... When I was in the darkness. This story starts before COVID and before 2020. Back in 2018. I want to introduce you to someone special to me. This is Drew Townsend.



Drew was my brother's best friend for seven years and he was like a brother to me. Drew was one of the kindest people you could have ever known, he was constantly making everyone around him laugh and smile.

Although Drew always seemed like he was in the light, he himself was fighting a battle with darkness, a battle with depression. You see, Drew did not have the best home life. This led to him coming to live with my family for the summer. That summer was one of the best summers in my life. My brother, Drew and I got to hang out all the time. He quickly became one of my favorite people. You just wanted to be around Drew. Drew made everything great.

On August 6, 2018, I got up and got ready to go to tennis practice. I went downstairs and the basement light was on, which was Drew's room. I went down to say good morning and that is when I saw the outcome of his battle with the darkness. He lost his battle with depression.

The rest of the day was a blur. After the police came we were told it would be better if we were outside of the house and we were told we could not tell anyone until they took Drew away. I didn't know what to do. I was shocked and confused.

At this time in my life, Church wasn't a thing for me. Even though I never went to church, I pulled out my phone and texted my boyfriend. I knew he and his family were active members here. I asked him "How does God feel about people in this situation?" I asked him so many questions about what I had just experienced. He answered all my questions, honestly, and without knowing what had happened to Drew. It wasn't until later in the day that I actually was able to tell him what had happened.

The next couple weeks was the darkest time of my life, I cried myself to sleep at night and didn't tell anyone. I pretended that I was fine and I focused on making sure everyone else around me was coping well with the tragedy instead of focusing on myself and how I was coping. Throughout the next couple of weeks I was constantly asking my boyfriend questions about God and I began to see the light of God. His family invited me to this amazing church and have been coming ever since. In the darkest time of my life, I was able to see the light of God. Something that I had not seen before.

Every year, we usually look back and reflect on the highs and lows of the year. With the year 2020 coming to the end, most of us just want to wash our hands of the year and move on. However, we still should take time to pause and reflect on it, because we can still learn how we can do better in 2021.

The first thing that 2020 has shown us is that reinvention is good.



There have been some amazing things that have come out of this year. I have been helping with Wednesday nights dinners since I started coming to this church. When I first started, it seemed that there were about 60-75 people on average. During the pandemic, Wednesday night dinners turned into a drive through. These dinners have been reinvented. While they have been keeping a small staff, Judy has invited some of the youth to come back and help with the drive through because it has exploded. We average over 300 meals now, and the last Ham loaf night had a line that stretched around the parking lot. However, it isn't just people coming to get dinners for themselves. People are coming to buy meals to then give them away to friends, family, and shut in. It is beautiful to see how a limited program has been reborn into something far more spectacular.

The second thing we can learn from 2020 is life is unpredictable and can change in an instance.



Going into 2021 we can appreciate the small things in life and cherish every conversation we have with our loved ones, even if it is through the phone, on video messaging, or through

a window. Personally for me, even though I was not able to see my Great Grandpa on Christmas or his 94th birthday, I was still able to talk to him over the phone and enjoy that time with him.

The third thing we can learn from 2021 is how we can control our emotions when things don't go our way.



The scripture days give us directions on how we can do this. The first step in controlling our negative emotions is to understand some of the things that make us angry. Determine if these things are actually worth getting upset over. Then look at why you react the way you do, and practice inviting God's light in to help you calm down so you don't hurt someone or something. Losing control of our emotions can cause unconscionable results. But even if the damage is only skin-deep, it hurts. This past year we have seen a lot of people tear others down because of their emotions. Some of us probably have also done some tearing. God doesn't want us to tear things or people down, but to build them up—even if they have wounded or rejected us. Ephesians does a pretty good job explaining how we ought to behave and treat one another. Anger is just one of the negative things that can lead us astray. This passage helps us understand why we need to be more thoughtful about our actions. And because Jesus died so that we may be forgiven, we can forgive others, too. We can choose to build others up and be God's light.

Lastly, 2020 has taught us a lot about mental health.



People's mental health has been hit hard this year. Even if it seems like they are the happiest person in the world- they can be fighting hard internal battles that are simply not visible. Going into 2021 we can learn to be kinder to everyone we met because we do not know what they are going through. We can learn that we need to check up on our friends and family. Don't put off a conversation or phone call. We have the time and the people in our lives are never an inconvenience.

So, I leave you with this.... 2020 is over. We've made it.

We might be a little beaten up but we survived. While this year was dark, there was also a lot of light. I challenge everyone to continue to look for God's light. Be God's light. Reinvent the things that can be. Cherish the little things and don't take them for granted. Work to keep your emotions in check with God's

light and try to build others up instead of tearing them down. And finally... be God's light for all who you interact with.

You never really know who is trying to navigate the darkness.

Thank you