

You Are The Light In The Lord

12/17/2014

Thank you all for being here today and as you know today is the fourth Sunday of Advent. Advent is a journey where we're invited to move from darkness into light. It's a journey that culminates tomorrow as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. As I share this message with you today, it is shared with the hope that it will deepen for you and me that sense that call from our Lord deep within each of our hearts to continue to move from darkness into His light.

Fighting back the tears and struggling to catch his breath, Robbie Parker shared, "My daughter Emily would be one giving her love and support to all the victims because that's the type of person she was; not because of any parenting we did but because they were the gifts given to her by her heavenly father. As the deep pain begins to settle into our hearts we realize Emily was an incredible person who touched many in her short life; bright, loving and creative, her laughter was infectious and she liked to try new things except new food. I'm so blessed to be her dad".

He went on to express sympathy for the family of the man who killed 26 people at Sandy Hook Elementary a little over a week ago. He said, "I can imagine how hard you find this experience at this moment for you. I know in this tragedy that happened a little bit over a week ago and yet in some way it seems like just yesterday there are many heroes on that day. There are many people who behaved in ways that were just an example to all of us, but for me I find Robbie and his story to be a true light in the darkness that was faced."

Today in Ephesians, we read about this journey again of darkness into light. We read in Ephesians, "Once you were darkness but now you are light in the Lord." And it's interesting, as we look at that particular chapter in Ephesians that light is described in some very real and clear terms. It talks about light being a fruit that, it is fruitful, that it is productive, that it is something that grows and grows in all goodness, righteousness and truth. Goodness that quality that blesses other people; that quality that people want to be around; that quality of blessing another person's life because you're good. Righteousness - the very holiness of God; what you and I already are. We are called the holy of the Lord which means simply that we are set apart to Him to live in relationship with Him in a way that is transforming for us and for others. And then finally truth that ability; ability to have a degree of integrity in your life that is real to have character; to have sincerity especially when the door's closed and nobody else is looking.

As you look through the rest of this particular chapter in Ephesians, it also talks about the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit. And one of the realities beloved of God for you and me is that in order for us even to begin to be able to walk in the light, to be light in the Lord, for you and I, even to begin to walk in these fruits of goodness and righteousness and truth; you and I need to be filled with the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit, so that we might be empowered to live this life, that for us is humanly impossible.

You know as I heard Robbie share about his daughter Emily, he shared that she was a gifted creation of her heavenly father he talked about the uniqueness in the beauty of her life in particular. And one of the things that was interesting to me is that during his brief statement, he wasn't talking about how great he was as a parent or his wife, but he was talking about the uniqueness and the beauty of his daughter. At the tender age of six years; all that she lived and yet he saw and heard her uniqueness and what it was that made her special. And for me this is one of the fruits of the light. If you will, he saw the beauty of his daughter

because he loved her and he cared about her. It really wasn't about him; it was about the beauty of who she was in God. Also I found that in his ability to express sympathy to the killer's family he reached out and compassion to them. He did this a little bit over a day after this took place. And many, many people I'm sure were in shock that he was even able to do this. Many to this day, and for the foreseeable future, he will look on this family with anger with hatred with wondering how they could ever let such a thing even begin to happen. And on some level, that is understandable. What is not understandable, to at least humanize is how a human being a father who is just lost one of his daughters to reach out to and compassion to a family and the only explanation for that is the Divine. In some way, God moved through his heart to reach out in love in a way that touched all of us very powerfully.

He went on to share, "Don't turn the shooting into something that defines us, but something that inspires us to be better, more compassionate and more humble". I don't know Robbie. I've never met him; I don't know what he's going through. I'm sure he'll have his ups and downs in his life. I probably don't agree with him on everything as he probably doesn't agree with me on everything. But Robbie and his response I believe, is an example to us of what it is to be light in the Lord. And I trust that for you as well as for me. It is an incredible encouragement to know that we can face some of the darkest and most tragic and most struggling moments in our lives. And in those moments, the Lord can be with us. The Lord can be strengthening us. The Lord can enable us by his power to be a light in ways that you and I can only begin to dream of.

There was another powerful reality present during this whole tragedy at Sandy Hook as well and that was the reality of darkness. This is something Ephesians 5 talks about as well. One of the things about darkness that you hear described in Ephesians 5 is that it's unfruitful. It's unfruitful because what happens as a result of darkness is evil; it is sin. And it brings about a humanity that is less because of it darkness here described is that of immorality, impurity and greed. We hear in this particular description that you can't even talk about what they do in secret that's how bad it is. On this particular day at Sandy Hook, it was the murder of 26 human beings; 20 kids and six adults. And the reality and the sadness that you and I continue to feel, the heartbreak that is deep is real is because we know that on that day we all lost something. And it brought home for me as well, the shooting in Colorado, Columbine, and so many other tragedies that have happened in this country for a number of different reasons.

Col. Grossman is a West Point psychology professor and Airborne Ranger infantry officer who has over 23 years of experience working with soldiers all over the world. He states they've all trained on video games, citing research conducted for his book. Stop teaching our kids to kill, a call to action against TV movie and videogame violence. Grossman advised that the average kid has practiced over 1 million kills in the simulator. Video games these days are total virtual reality simulators simulating Rob kill still for hundreds of hours on end. Grossman displayed a series of brain scans showing that the kids of violence have underdeveloped fore brains and overdeveloped midbrains. In other words, there is scientific evidence proving that these type of violent video games shut down the portion of the brain that is logical and predictable. The safety catch has been turned off. Removing this new factor of video violent media would reduce violent risk 2 to 3 times. Now one of the things that is already happening and will continue to unfold over the coming days and weeks and months is that there's going to be a conversation, at least I hope, it is a genuine conversation which would be something new for us wouldn't even at the political level, but is something we desperately need. There's going to be hopefully a conversation in the time to come about gun control. There's going to be a conversation about mental illness.

There's gonna be a conversation about security at our schools and other places and all of these conversations are incredibly important. And it's important that we're a part of them. It is important that their vigorous and spirited and debated and heartfelt. And I hope and pray and I ask you to join me in this prayer that we won't just take a one part solution because for me this is a multifaceted issue that needs to

be addressed in all of its colors to be touched on. But as we have this conversation my question to you and me here today is, who's going to talk about the poison? Who's going to talk about the poison from our media that is literally poisoning the spirits of our children and poisoning your spirit and my spirit? Who's going to have the courage to sit down and have a talk with their son or daughter? Who is the parent of your granddaughter or grandson who is maybe playing that violent videogame or watching that violent show or part of that violent activity who is going to have the courage to sit down and had a conversation? And just use me and say, "I heard the sermon by my priest at the church you know or we were concerned about this violence that is happening and what happened at Sandy Hook and the effect of violence is having in our kids and I'm just concerned about all of this and let's have a conversation.

It started out that way but those of the conversations around the kitchen table that need to begin to happen. And believe me Jan I know these aren't easy conversations. We had with our girls about what they watch and what they listen to in terms of their music because it affects them. And they turn something on the TV with a unit we come in is a note you might not want to be watching that effect when we change the channel right now. And let's talk about why you should be watching that you know you really don't want to be listening to that heavy metal song on your iPod right now, how about if we delete that. And they aren't too pleased with that they don't like those conversations. But those are the conversations that need to happen because the thing that you and I, beloved of God, need to begin to own. is that it is poison to the spirit, it is poison it is darkness it is not light and again what does it look like for you and me to begin to change the channel when we are watching something an episode that is violent where they've killed the hundredth person within an hour or or the other filth that's on there. When are you and I going to get to the place of being willing to change the channel and begin to tune into the light, the things that you and I have done to our spirit in the name of entertainment and this is part of the conversation; this is part of the calling of moving from darkness to light and I'm there with you as much as you are hearing this today. I'm hearing this as well, there are some things, and some choices that I need to make to move more closely to light. And I ask you to pray for me as I pray for you but these are important steps. And these are important things that you and I can begin to do as a beloved of God.

Christmas Eve is tomorrow. When this happened a little over a week ago, I said to myself, "How can I even begin to celebrate Christmas? I mean, my heart was so broken. One of the reasons wanting to talk about this last weekend because I couldn't because I was so overwhelmed that I was still getting information and I still for broken about it. How can we even begin to celebrate Christmas tomorrow?" So I began to think and pray about that. I began to cry before the Lord on that because I needed an answer on that because I was truly struggling in the death of my heart. How can I be joyful? How can I celebrate the light in the midst of such a great darkness, in the tragedy that has robbed us all? And then I realized I needed Christmas more this year than I ever did before, because in the reality of this tragedy that happened at Sandy Hook, it helped me to see more clearly how important Christmas is and the reality on that first Christmas day, is that God so loved the world that he sent His son, the Light of the world, into our dark world - that we might receive Him and become children of God again. God so loved the world that He didn't send the committee. God so loved the world that He didn't send 10 points to maximum personal self-greatness that you read and you study in a book and you become great on your own. God so loved the world that He sent the light of his Savior into the darkness of our lives because that is exactly what we needed. And that is what we still need today. As much as the cultural elite and the so-called intellectuals of our day want to say to us that God is dead; that evil is a lie; that sin doesn't exist. These incredible evils and expressions of darkness keep exploding in our midst and it's a big red siren for those who want to look at it and say, "You know what, something is wrong here. You're missing something incredibly important and beloved part of what we're missing in this country is God." We're missing God. When we show God the door at our institutions and in other places that are important to us. Darkness takes over because of our choices. And so I want to celebrate Christmas this year because really I need to celebrate Christmas this year. I need to know and remember that the light of Jesus is come into my dark world that desperately

needs him right now. And I want to receive that light fresh in a way that will transform my life and transform years as well.

So how can we be light in the Lord in this present darkness? I think it is the question of this century. How can we be light in the Lord in this present darkness? First of all, I would say to all of us, surrender to the light. Surrender to the light. You remember the testimonies we had last week the wonderful testimonies and when I heard time after time after time was this reality. That in the midst of their own struggle and darkness, that they were facing they surrender to the light of the Lord in a way that was deep and new; that's what you and I need to begin to do is surrender to the light, leave that darkness, open up the door to that room; move away from where you were and move into who God is calling you to become.

In His welcome the Holy Spirit only by the power of the Holy Spirit can you and I begin to make the moves in our personal life from the darkness. That we hold to the light that God is inviting us to move into from immorality to morality; from greed to generosity; from impurity to purity. We can get there by the power the Holy Spirit and be open to compassion and humility. Finally I would say to you celebrate and treasure every life that touches yours, from the womb to old age. Every gift of life that we have is a gift from God and we don't know how long they will be there.

Emily's dad shared one more thing that made her unique and one of the reasons the world was a better place with Emily in it, and I quote, "She was artistic and always carried around markers and pencils so that if someone was sad or frustrated she would get out some paper or card and draw something on it to cheer them up. There was a special card she made and put in the casket of her grandpa who died a few months ago." By the way, she was just buried by him the other day. Emily, precious ones of Sandy Hook, I say to you this day on behalf of the St. John's family, be blessed in the light of the Lord.

I like to share part of a poem that echoes this hope with all of you:

T'was 11 days before Christmas around 9:38 when 20 beautiful children storm through Heaven's Gate. Their smiles were contagious; their laughter filled the air; they could hardly believe all the beauty that was there. They were filled with such joy; they didn't know what to say. They remember nothing of what happened that day. "Where are we?" we asked the little girl as quiet as a mouse. "This is Heaven," declared a small boy. "We're spending Christmas at God's house." When what to their wondering eyes did appear but Jesus their Savior. The children gathered near. He looked at them and smiled and they smiled just the same. Then he opened his arms and He called them each by name. And in that moment was joy that only heaven could bring. Those children all flew into the arms of their King. And as they lingered in the warmth of His embrace, one small girl turned and looked at Jesus's face. And as if He could read all the question she had. He gently whispered to her, "I'll take care of mom and dad"; then He looked down on earth; the world far below. He saw the hurt; the sorrow and woe. He closed his eyes and He out stretched his hand. Let my power in my presence reenter this land. Then He and the children stood up without a sound; come now my children let me show you around. Excitement filled the space. Some skipped and some ran. All displayed enthusiasm that only a small child can. And I heard him proclaim as he walked out of sight, "In the midst of this darkness I am still the light."