

Isaiah 9:2

February 9, 2020

“Did You See the Super Bowl”

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**Opening Prayer** – “Ever Loving, Ever Giving, Ever Gracious God...when the world seems unsteady we look to you to provide a foundation...when the times seem dark we look to you to provide a guiding light...when the circumstances seem hopeless we look to you to provide a word of hope...be again our solid rock on which to stand...be again our light in the darkness...be again our hope...guiding us into the future, this we pray in your Holy Name for you are our Rock & our Redeemer. Amen.

One week ago, the world watched as Super Bowl LIV ensued. Gridiron greatness unfolded between – who? Who was in the Super Bowl this year?

Well, I guess you can see how tuned in I was...

However, if you ask me about the commercials that is another story.

If, you are like me, you watch the super bowl for the advertisements.

I had a few that made me laugh...some made me think...some made me ask *what in God's creation are they selling?*...

One cause me to rewind and watch again...&...it came back into my mind a time or ten for the remainder of the game. Perhaps, you saw it too, The New York Life Insurance: ‘Love Takes Action’ ad.

It opens by describing the four words the Greeks used to describe love (Rev. Wright referenced these in a recent sermon):

Philia – affection growing from friendship

Storge – the kind of love you have for a grandparent or sibling

Eros – a romantic love which causes people to say ‘I Love You’

“The fourth kind of love,” they say is, “is different...” **[9:30 am – play video clip]**

“It is the most admirable, it is called, Agape.”

The advertisement goes on to say that love has an action.

It takes courage (showing tween youth shaving their heads while facetimeing a friend flashing them the peace sign while lying in a hospital bed);

Sacrifice (while a single parent braids a daughters hair over breakfast and rushes out the door to get their two children off to school);

Strength (while showing a big brother setting his little brother into the passenger seat of the car during a rainstorm then loading a wheelchair into the trunk cargo space.)

They end with their sales pitch which says, “for 175 years we’ve been helping people act on their love so they can look back ... or ... look ahead and say, *we got it right...we did good.*”

They created a hashtag in their advertisement campaign #LoveTakesAction.

While, I will agree, with some of my online social media friends, that on one level the ad got the gist of Agape a bit incorrect – believe New York Life to lobby for Agape to mean love as an action – when we all will agree that a bit better translation of Agape is ‘unconditional love.’ That said, I will lobby – and I don’t think I’m alone

here – that when one encounters ‘unconditional love’ and especially the kind revealed by God most fully in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ – one is motivated to live that love out in their surrounding communities.

So, love is both unconditional & conditional – in that it is best received when we’ve done nothing to merit it & it calls us to be better contributors in the lives of those we encounter.

Perhaps the logic goes, as I have heard before, *love the feeling is revealed through love the action.*

That is what we are called to be – as Christians – as faithful followers – as Christ devotees – hearers & doers of the Word.

In December 2012, we thought about the unthinkable.

We watched a difficult week unfold as the worst news imaginable raced across world at the speed of light – something terrible had happened in CT.

Friday, December 14<sup>th</sup> – we watched...we waited...we held our breath and at times breathed communal sighs of despair as the horror and atrocity at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT unfolded before our eyes.

We thought the unthinkable as we learned of those 20 first grade students and 6 teachers and school officials who lost their lives in a senseless act of gun violence.

What could be more horrible...more awful...more evil?

Our heads hurt as we found ourselves turning away because we just couldn’t process the unfathomable.

We resonated with comments like, “I’m tired of crying.” For our eyes were red and swollen – our cheeks streaked from too many tears.

We found ourselves asking communally:

What do we do in the aftermath of something like this?

What do we say in the days which follow?

Where do we go from here?

Together we took a step forward – in the direction of healing.

So many communities gathered for prayer – and companionship – to light candles amid dark times.

People gathered to remember and pray for those whose lives had been shattered – those who will be forever changed having received the word that someone they love was the victim of a senseless act.

People gathered to remember and pray for those who grieve the loss of: sons and daughters; grandsons & granddaughters; spouses; members of their extended families; the families of those children who must return knowing their friends will never be seated next to them nor be part of their graduating class; the community of Newtown, CT – a city name that has forever been etched into our communal psyche.

People gathered to acknowledge their own grief and deep pain over innocence lost and to consider what it is faith leads us to say and do in this time.

The words from the Old Testament book of Isaiah assist in times such as that December day – to set the tone for these words, Isaiah is speaking to a beleaguered people...they had known suffering...they felt broken, demoralized and distraught ...Isaiah names the crises they have been living through and enduring...in a very real sense, Isaiah could be speaking to us – on so many levels – today when he says in Isaiah 9:2b –

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;

those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.”

When we find ourselves experiencing and enduring darkness – amid the myriad of questions – one which resonates with me is, “When WILL we SEE the light again?”

In times such as those, I have a few “go-to” people and sayings.

The first is Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa – that woman of profound faith who worked with the poorest of the poor in Calcutta, India – receiving the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts and the accolades of so many others – before her death was asked in an interview, “What will be the first thing you ask God when you stand face-to-face?”

She is said to have responded, “I’m going to take God into a room. I’m going to take a seat across the table – look God straight in the eye and say, ‘You’ve got a lot of explaining to do.’”

“You’ve got a lot of explaining to do.” Profound words. Poignant words. And the way I see it, if this woman of faith can have the courage & audacity to speak words like these to God, then why can’t we. For no one understands the gravity of those words better than we – after witnessing senseless acts like those we saw at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012.

In times such as those we are called to bring our tears – to bring our fears – to bring our anger – to bring our faith (EVEN IF IT IS HAIR THIN AT TIMES) – to our God – in times such as those we are called to bring our hope for a brighter tomorrow.

Mother Teresa has spoken other words which ring true for me, she says, “What I do you cannot do; but what you do, I cannot do. The needs are great, and none of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful.”

A second “go-to” person for me in times of chaos, catastrophe, and crises is Fred Rogers – of Mr. Rogers Neighborhood – Mr. Rogers a Presbyterian Minister has given us some pretty good advice in raising children in a troubled world. In times of tragedy Mr. Rogers had several good recommendations. Shortly after the horror of Newtown, CT his words began to circulate throughout the social media realm. In talking about such times, Mr. Rogers recalls words his mother spoke to him, he said, “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers, Fred. You will always find people who are helping.’” [Mr. Rogers continues,] “To this day, especially in times of ‘disaster,’ I remember my mother’s words, and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers – so many caring people in this world.”

Mr. Rogers advice is good for us – do not deny the terribly sad and scary events that occur – we should also look for the helpers the ones who rush to help and care – those stories are there – teachers, principals, people with outrageous courage in the face of evil and death – those stories are heart-breakingly true – and those stories point us back toward the good news of our faith – that amid the darkness we have seen a great light AND that light cannot be extinguished.

In the wake of Sandy Hook, Ann Curry – NBC news correspondent who was on scene covering the events – began a movement just days afterward – it was called #20 or #26 – she started a movement in which people commit to doing 20 or 26 Random Acts of Kindness for others – each one in memory and honor of one of the twenty children and six adults who lost their lives that Friday.

- “Gave coffee barista \$26.00,” someone Tweets, “to buy peoples coffee this morning until it runs out. She asked my name I said #26Acts.”
- “9 year old gave homeless man leftovers from dinner then found him and gave him his \$3 allowance as well.”
- Maybe someday, somebody will enact this one, “Sat next to someone at lunch today that not many people ever sit with and we talked while we ate.”

As Ghandi said, “Be the change that you wish to see in this world.”

Landrum Leavell writes,

“Have you ever thought that light is aggressive? It is. When you open the curtain in a lighted room to the outside darkness, the light spills out – darkness does not spill in. Light Pushes Back the Darkness.”

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.”

Be the Light. Our actions matter – our involvement with each other matters – our caring matters – how will we respond to the darkness which surrounds us – we will respond by being helpers – by being harbingers of the light in order that we will declare in the face of dark times – we know the light – we believe in the light – we will proclaim the light – darkness will not win – for the light cannot be extinguished.

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.”

By God’s grace may we live these words into existence.

#LoveTakesAction

#SoLetItBe

#Amen