

The Light Shines In The Darkness

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Easter Sunrise

Dr. Stephen D. McConnell

You may have heard the story of the man who had come to the point of desperation in his life so he walked out onto the middle of the Brooklyn Bridge and climbed up onto the parapet and was about to leap into the East River when a policeman laid an arresting hand on him and drew him back. The man protested to the policeman, "You don't understand how miserable my life is and how hopeless things have become. Please, let me jump."

The kind-hearted officer tried to talk sense into the man and finally said, "I will make you this proposition. You take five minutes and give your reasons for why life is not worth living, and then I will take five minutes and give my reasons for why I think life is worth living both for you and for me. If at the end of the ten minutes you still feel liking jumping I will not stop you."

The man agreed and proceeded to take his five minutes to explain why life was not worth living . The officer then took his five minutes to explain why life was worth living for the both of them. And at the end of the ten minutes the two men joined hands and jumped off the bridge.

Life has an unfortunate way sometimes of convincing us that it is empty of meaning – that there isn't much worth to it. Probably since they began publishing newspapers curious readers of the

daily news can come away with just a quick glance and wonder what really is the purpose and meaning of life. Tomorrow they run the Boston Marathon and tomorrow what may first come to mind is not thousands and thousands of expectant and eager runners, but the fear and sadness and shock of a year ago when a finish line that was supposed to mark victory for thousands, marked instead terror and pain. The world can do that to you – turn the good things into the bad things. Turn joy into sorrow. Victory into pain.

Television shows these days can make one quickly wonder if the fall of American civilization is not close at hand. Reality shows allow us to peer into the brokenness of people's lives and families and cause you to wonder if there is hope for the human race. One week with the Kardashians or the Housewives of New Jersey can make you jump off any bridge.

And those are just the external elements. There are internal elements as well that can make us doubt whether life is worth living. A poor prognosis from the doctor. A condition of chronic pain. Grief over the loss of a loved one. Unemployment. You name it. I have a dear friend who has suffered a couple of times from clinical depression – who told me that clinical depression is the great liar. It seeks to convince you of things that are not true. If it is a beautiful day – it tells you that it is an awful day. If you are surrounded by blessings – it tells you that you are lacking in many things. If you are a gifted person – it tells you that you are worth little. Depression is the great liar.

The truth is there are a lot of voices out there that don't want to tell you the truth. Voices that want to convince you that you should be more afraid, more in debt, more angry, more discouraged, more cynical, more worried that some other shoe is going to drop. Like the guy whose friend said, "Buck up things could be worse." So he bucked up and things got worse. Or the guy who went to see his doctor because he felt he was suffering from an inferiority complex. So the doctor ran some tests and had him come in a couple weeks later. The doctor said, "Well I have good news and bad news. The good news is the tests I ran to see if you have an inferiority complex all came back negative. You have no indication of a complex. The bad news is – you really are inferior." The world is filled with those kinds of voices that want to tell us things we're not.

You know the voices of Easter weekend were voices that said it was over. Jesus had been crucified. Jesus had breathed his last. Jesus had been taken down from the cross. Jesus had been laid in the tomb. Jesus had been sealed behind an unmovable stone. And the voices of Friday and Saturday said that it was over. Things are as they have always been. Nothing changes. You can hope for something better but it's not going to happen. Those are the voices of Friday and Saturday. There are no Messiahs. There is no meaning really to this life. We can hope that there is something more to all this, but there isn't. Like the bumper sticker I saw a few years ago that said, "You're born cold, wet and hungry and then things get worse."

But then on Easter morning the sun comes up. Now the sun comes up every morning – but this Sunday morning not only did the sun come up, but an angel came down. And not only did an angel come down, but a stone got rolled away. And not only did a stone get rolled away, but the light pierced into the darkness of a tomb. Not only did the light pierce the darkness of the tomb, but the light of the world pierced the morning. The light of the world walked into that early morning garden and now the world was never going to be the same. Because the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Do you hear that? The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not and will not overcome it.

That's what Easter sunrise is all about. That's why we drag ourselves out of bed – or why someone else dragged us out of bed – and come here bleary eyed and chilly – we could do this any day we want – but we don't – but we come this morning because the good news is that the light is still shining in the darkness and we who worship here this morning are here to find the light again, to see the light again ... and to take the light again into the world.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." And in a world filled with so many voices of discouragement and disappointment and despair – it's the angels who are here to tell us, "He is not here, he is risen!" The dark tomb is no longer dark. The closed tomb is no longer closed. The

occupied tomb is no longer occupied. Why do you look for the living among the dead? Good question!!

And so we get to be the Easter people! And what Easter people get to be are people of the light. We get to be people of the light. People who come again to the beach and to the garden and see here the light of the world. The risen Jesus. We get to take in the light. Like those early followers of Jesus – we get to see and take in the light of the One who walks out of the darkness. As sure as the sun is rising right now in the east – we get to take in the light of Christ. But here's the deal. WE don't just get to absorb the light of Christ on Easter morning, we don't get to just take in the light. We don't get to just say, "Boy, wasn't that a nice Sunrise service, now let's go get breakfast." We're not here to just absorb the light of Christ, we're here to reflect it!!! We get to reflect the light of Christ wherever we go – into whatever darkness we might find ourselves. That's the whole point. Not only has death been conquered in Christ – but now we get to bring life into a world where death seems to be winning the game. We get to turn the dark forces into forces of light. That's what the Easter people do -- we get to reflect the light of Christ and turn the dark forces into forces of hope.

Thirty years ago when I was graduating from college, I started hearing about a young Canadian boy named Terry Fox. We were the same age. In the midst of college Terry had awakened with a sharp pain in his leg. Soon he was told that it was bone cancer that was causing the pain and that his right leg needed to be amputated above the knee. The night before his surgery, Terry said, God spoke to him in a dream. He dreamt that he would run across Canada from shore to shore. That's a cruel thing for God to tell a young man on the night before losing his leg. No one-legged boy runs across Canada. He never forgot what God had spoken to him. God had some light to shine in the darkness. He told his parents and friends about the dream after his surgery and they looked at him with polite smiles and shook their heads and said, "Not going to happen." No one runs across Canada with one leg. It didn't matter, there is no darkness that God cannot shine his light into. Months after his amputation he began training working up to 13 ½ miles a day. A day!!! On a prosthesis. In April of 1980 he began his marathon. It was going to be a marathon to raise

money for cancer research. He asked people to pledge money for his run across Canada. He dipped his artificial leg into the Atlantic up in New Foundland and started his run. He averaged 28 to 30 miles a day. But for the first 1000 miles no one really noticed. But Terry kept running anyway. Soon people began to see that this kid was for real. And all of a sudden pledges began to pour in with every mile that Terry ran. People began to crowd the streets of the small towns through which he ran. After five months Terry Fox had put 3300 miles behind him and that is when he started to cough ... and it's when he started to feel weak. But he kept on going, but the cough got worse and his legs grew weaker ... and they discovered cancer in Terry's lungs. This time they could not stop it. But you know what? They couldn't stop the pledges from coming in either. Terry had stopped running, but they couldn't stop people from giving money. The pledges kept coming and coming and coming. God was fulfilling what he had spoken to Terry in that dream. Months later Terry Fox died ... but not without raising \$22,000,000 for cancer research. Today the Terry Fox foundation has raised over \$600 million for cancer research. Some said that Terry had lost the battle to the darkness – but we know better, because the light shines in the darkness.

I don't know what your life looks like right now. I don't know what your world looks like right. Maybe it's all peaches and cream. Maybe it's blue skies everywhere. Or maybe there's some darkness in your soul or some darkness in the world that needs some light. Maybe you have a hurdle to climb – and particular challenge to face. Maybe even the world has been unkind.

Maybe like Heather Abbot. Heather Abbot was one of those standing too close to one of those Boston bombs a year ago. She lost her leg and endured several surgeries. But the darkness will not overcome. She's planning to run the last half mile tomorrow. She's going to finish. She's going to cross the finish line. She will be a victor. So they asked her for a message. What's your message to this world of terror and bombs? And she said this is my message. I've got less leg now ... but more heart. Less leg now, but more heart. That's called shining the light in the darkness.

My friends, the sun has come up. Darkness has lost again. The tomb is empty. The stone is rolled away. And we get to be the Easter people. The world is desperate to hear a different voice.

No more discouragement. No more despair. No more darkness. "I am the light of the world," Jesus said. And that isn't just today ... that's every day. And that isn't just on this sandy beach, but it is everywhere where the darkness seems too dark and hope seems too far gone. We've got good news! Jesus is the light of the world. And the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not and will not overcome it.