

SHINE FORTH

His name is Alexander Papaderos. He grew up in Greece, raised as a child in a remote village by parents who were very poor. When Germany occupied Greece during World War II, a German motorcycle was wrecked in Papaderos' village. Papaderos describes how he found the broken pieces of the mirror that was attached to the motorcycle's handlebar, and how he tried to put it back together, but it was so shattered it wasn't possible. So he kept the largest piece of the mirror. Little by little, by scratching it against a stone, he made the fragment of mirror round, about the size of a quarter, which he carried around wherever he went. He was fascinated that, with this little mirror, he could reflect the sunlight into dark places where the sunlight could never shine – into places like deep holes, crevices, and dark closets. In time, he says, it became a game for him to see where he could get the light to shine.

Years passed and Alexander Papaderos became an honored and respected politician for his efforts at bringing peace and helping the afflicted. In his own way, he was bringing light into the dark places of life. Many years later at a conference someone asked Papaderos what is the meaning of life? Taking his wallet out of his pocket, he brought out the small mirror he found and shaped when he was a boy. He then told them how, when he was a young boy, he had used the mirror to reflect light into dark places.

And then he said: "As I became a man, I grew to understand that this was not just a child's game, but actually what I might do with my life. I came to understand that I am not the light, nor the source of the light. But light, that is truth, understanding, and knowledge – is here, but it will only shine in many dark places if I reflect it. I am only a fragment of a mirror, a mirror whose design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I have I can reflect light into the dark places of this world. Into the black places of the human heart – and change some things in some people. Perhaps others may see and do likewise. But this is what I am about. This is the meaning of life to me." Then Papaderos took the small mirror over to the window and used it to reflect the sunlight onto the faces of the people there in the room. (Told by R. Curtis Fussell)

Whether Alexander Papaderos knew it or not, he vividly illuminated the Ephesians' passage for today. Earlier in this same chapter, the author exhorts the church at Ephesus (and Christians in every place and time) to "be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us." Then, in the text for today, all of us are reminded of how "Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light." Christ is the light of the world and, because he is in us and we are in him, we are light and the light of Christ must shine forth from us.

We light up the world with our witness to Christ and our compassionate service to others as we do "all that is good and right and true." The author of Ephesians gives another reason why Christ's light within us must shine forth – we are told to "take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them... everything exposed by the light becomes visible." We shine forth in our witness to God's love for all, in our good deeds for others, and in naming the darkness so that those who dwell in the darkness may realize the error of their ways and want to move into the light.

You have probably seen or heard by now that the Virgil's White Knights and the Rebel Brigade Knights of the Ku Klux Klan are hosting a Klan rally here in Martinsville

this weekend. There are video clips on You Tube that show a Klan leader (dressed in white with hooded attire) inviting all Klan brothers and sisters to come to Martinsville for a rally, a march, and a cross-burning. Their slogan is: “If it ain’t white, it ain’t right.” This is a prime example of the kind of darkness that needs to be exposed to the light and denounced as being evil. There is no way possible to justify the hatred and bigotry that the **Ku Klux Klan** is known for and delights in as it spews **racial slurs** in every direction while upholding what they believe to be the superiority of the white race.

It is an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ that the Klan considers itself to be a Christian organization. Quite obviously, the Klan has never read the Bible, which states emphatically: “Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also” (1 John 4:20-21).

While it is imperative to expose the darkness of the Ku Klux Klan, at the same time, it is important to show compassion to the very ones who embrace this twisted mindset. If we hate those persons, who proclaim “white power,” we have committed the very same dark sin as they have – we have hated those who are different from us. Most likely, those who embrace the KKK worldview grew up in homes where racism was a daily reality. To walk in the light is to disagree vehemently with the evil pronouncements and actions of the KKK while seeking to understand those who live under the cover of the hood and to bring them into the light. As the modern-day prophet, Will Campbell, once said, “Being pro-Klansman is not the same as pro-Klan. The former has to do with a person, the other with an ideology” (Brother to a Dragonfly, p. 244).

As we point the finger and expose the darkness in others, there is also that sense of three fingers pointing back at us. What sin in our lives needs to be exposed to the light? While we may not attend a rally or be a card carrying member of the KKK, have we ever, even if for a moment, entertained the idea that we were better than someone else whose skin color, religious beliefs, gender or sexual orientation, educational background, work experience or neighborhood was different from our own? What prejudices do we carry around inside of us? When have we professed our love of God and hated (or thought less of) a brother or a sister?

When I was an associate pastor in Richmond, our church partnered with the Metropolitan African American Baptist Church, which was an inner city congregation. We worshiped and worked together and tried to build bridges of understanding between us. At one point, we participated together in a program entitled City of Hope. We divided into groups of twelve that were half black and half white. In my group, the facilitator had us begin by going around the circle and introducing ourselves along with stating the very first time we could remember a difference between the races. As my turn drew nearer, my breathing became more rapid and shallow and my palms were sweaty. I really didn’t want to “come clean” but I knew that, in order for this to work, I would have to share. Finally, it was my turn; after giving my name, I said that I first became aware of racial differences when I was riding in the car with my parents or grandparents in certain areas of St. Louis and was told to lock the doors because we were in a bad part of town. As soon as I said that, one of the other members of the group (who just happened to be black) said, “Hey, that’s what my parents used to say when we drove into the white parts of the city!” The tension was relieved, and we began to connect and become one.

The experience made me realize that we all have prejudices and fears that we grow up with and we spend all of our lives trying to cast aside the darkness because it is evil. Once we were darkness, but now in the Lord we are light. We yearn for something better. We want to live fruitful lives that will produce what is good and right and true. In Christ, we have seen the Light. In Christ Jesus, we are the light and we know what is right, and we want to do that which is pleasing to the Lord.

The church's season of **Lent** offers us the opportunity to take a good, honest look at ourselves, to expose the darkness within, and to shine forth the light of Christ in our encounters with all others. Did you know that the word "Lent" in the Old English is *lengten*, which means the spring or springtime? In part, it reflects the fact that the days are lengthening. As the days lengthen, the flowers bloom, the leaves on the trees come out, and the grass grows. Likewise, Lent is a new beginning and a fresh start that God gives to us through the gift of the Son. Lent becomes for us a time to grow more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ. We are to grow and really become light in the world. With the **Holy Spirit**'s help, may we stretch and grow and become more loving in our attitudes and actions toward all others.

The table of our Lord awaits us, and there, Christ Jesus is Host. He beckons us to come saying, "Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Having been forgiven, let us share this holy meal. Then let us shine forth the **love and light of Christ** and strive to expose and dispel the darkness in our own lives and in the life of the world – all to the **glory of God the Father**, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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