

Lent B-4, 2009

March 22, 2009

John 3:14-21

Title: A Larger View, A Larger Life

There's something about living in Raleigh that makes me long for the mountains. You just can't see very far here. No real vistas or panoramic views here. I may be wrong about this, but in my time here, I've not found any location, except in one of those tall buildings down town, where you can see for distances. We may be the city of oaks and rolling hills, but together with those tall Eastern NC pine trees, what you behold are trees, trees and more trees.

This hit home for me when I actively bicycled the streets of North Raleigh. In spite of rapid development of one neighborhood after another, traveling over many a hill, you just can't see very far. When you peddle to the top of the hill, what you see is the next hill.

Does this kind of geography also compress our living? That unknowingly we grow used to a pared down landscape not only out there but in our hearts. The geography out there comes in here shaping our spiritual geography. So that we just don't see far or see much...just what's in front of our feet. We may have a direction we are going, but it's no further than the next hill. And we get used to this limited, flatline life.

For example, many of us set out in life toward something large. We were going to change the world—fight world hunger, work for literacy, start new churches. A vision that inspired. But you can't see it any more. Now you live for something far less, something like the weekend. It's not much, but it's out there.

Weekend becomes the symbol for less—no longer world hunger your are fighting just fighting the bulging beltline; no longer literacy just a good escape read; no longer new churches, just holding on to the one you got.

The weekend. Not much of a vista—at best between 1 and 5 days away and how illusive it becomes, over again and then. And then you may ask yourself Is That All I'm Living For? Just working for the weekend? Or to get this child to a certain age or to get this work assignment done or to make it through this recession. These are the flat lines of our lives. Sometimes that's about all you can do.

What do you notice about Jesus in this sliver of John 3? Jesus sees the big picture, the panorama, the fullness of life, what he calls eternal life. This is large, spacious, worth everything. Jesus also sees what's in the way of this life—darkness. Living pared down may be a benign darkness, but it's still dark. What's the one quality of darkness...it's restrictive!!

Light. Jesus' very claims about himself are to lift our sights. He's lifted up for the whole world. He positions himself at the intersection of God and the world.

And what he's come to give this world is not just a pat on the back, not just a get back in there and keep plugging toward that next weekend. What he gives is a stake in what really matters—eternal life.

And nothing stops him. He wants people to know eternal life.

Who is Jesus saying all this to? To a religious leader named Nicodemus, who ironically comes to Jesus in the darkness. We religious leaders don't come across too well in our encounter with Jesus. Just before this nocturnal encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus is in the Jerusalem temple kicking out the religious functionaries.

What is it about us religious leaders that provoke such ire?

We miss the big picture. We get side tracked, unknowing aids to darkness. It happens. Interested in preserving the church rather than enlisting people in becoming the church. It's not what you started out to do, but it's where you end up. Instead of mission, risk, adventure, it's maintenance, stability. More settled, than sent.

It can happen and before you know it you need to go like Nicodemus and have your vision redirected by Jesus, who wants the world wrapped in the joys of eternal life—peace, reconciliation, love, life giving relationships, goodness and light. These are gifts you can't buy, manufacture, fabricate.

So here we are, just yesterday 10 teams of youth and adults in this family of faith went out into our neighborhoods inviting people to church. We are participating in lifting people's sights, pointing them to Jesus—

--who out there have been living in darkness -- living without anything but the weekend to live for...

Jesus is passionate for them, for them to become bound up in the purposes he has to give, connected into the light that will not go out, joined to the community that says God has more in store.

There is no question that darkness is pervasive...but it doesn't spread like the light. Open a door between a darkened room and a lighted room and the light shines into the darkness, flooding the darkness with light.

Who could have imagined six apartments for 12 adults with developmental delays would become a reality this month. Folks who lived in the darkness of isolation, now in the light of enhanced community. This kind of light spreads---it's what Jesus intends for people...it opens the future. Light

Who could have imagined that we would continue find a way to remain connected to our brothers and sisters in the Mnene parish where all the support systems have crumbled and basic subsistence is in question. And they have not given in to the darkness, but continue to sing praises to Jesus living above their situation, teaching us something about the light.

God in his goodness and love made us for eternal life. Lift your sights. When you look to Jesus what do you see? See him beckoning you to the light of life eternal. It's where true joy shines.

So much so that he gave his life for it, for the whole world.