

Scripture: Isaiah 58.1-12  
Date: February 6, 2011  
Service: 5 Epiphany  
Place: St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Palatka, FL  
The Rev. Canon James M. Dorn III, Rector

*Your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.*

Depression is never a laughing matter; however, the TV series HEE HAW made it a little more palatable when 4 morose moonshine drinking hillbillies told a sad tale and sang;

Gloom, despair, and agony on me  
Deep, dark depression, excessive misery  
If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all  
Gloom, despair, and agony on me!

It's a psychological fact that darkness causes depression and misery, agony, and despair come from depression. People have differing views on depression, we all deal with depression differently, and a psychology professor even said, "A couple of depressed days a month is good for you. Your mind cannot be happy all the time." From people like my professor and others, we have been molded to think about depression in certain ways.

President Harry Truman said, "It's a recession when your neighbor loses his job; it's a depression when you lose yours."

A typical moment for Eeyore, the adorable depressed donkey, from A. A. Milne's book Winnie the Pooh is: "Pathetic," he said. "That's what it is. Pathetic." He turned and walked slowly down the stream for twenty yards, splashed across it, and walked slowly back on the other side. Then he looked at himself in the water again. "As I thought," he said. "No better from this side. But nobody minds. Nobody cares. Pathetic, that's what it is."

Charlie Brown influenced our views on depression when he said things such as, "This is my depressed stance. When you're depressed, it makes a lot of difference how you stand. The worst thing you can do is straighten up and hold your head high because then you'll start to feel better. If you're going to get any joy out of being depressed, you've got to stand like this."

And Psychologist Rollo May, whose Christian Spiritual life was nurtured by theologian Paul Tillich said, "Depression is the inability to construct a future."

Depression, its severity, and its cure is different for each person; however, its devastating effects can be lessened and even healed when one does what the Lord requires and allows the light of Christ to cure the gloom of their darkness. If light was not the cure to darkness, God's Word would not have begun, "*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.*" (Genesis 1:1-4 NRSV)

God saw the light as good; however, when humanity first sinned, they discovered the light wasn't so good because they discovered their sins could be seen by God, not that God can't see in the dark.

*They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"*

Sin creates stagnation, complacency, fear, and depression as we become increasingly worried someone will make us accountable for what we have done and what we have not done. The hillbillies of HEE HAW never discovered that drinking and the inability to see past their present condition actually increased their gloom, despair, and agony. Charlie Brown knew how to defeat his depression; unfortunately, he enjoyed being depressed, so he deliberately stayed in his depression posture instead of standing upright. And poor Eeyore, no matter how many times he saw his reflection, it never changed and in his depression he failed to see the joy in his own words, "No better from this side. But nobody minds. Nobody cares. Pathetic, that's what it is." What Eeyore thought was pathetic should have given him joy instead of depression because his friends Owl, Pooh, Piglet, and the others didn't mind and didn't care how he looked. They loved him just as he was even in the light of his own reflection.

Depression is an oppressive cloud caused by our sinful actions and inactions, which steals the light of joy Jesus Christ wants us to have as individuals and as His Church. And while darkness increases the effects of depression when it strikes, light, physical light, has been proven to help cure depression, especially SAD or Seasonal Affective Disorder.

If physical light from the sun or sunlamps can begin to bring us out of a depressed state; think how much faster our depression would go away if we would allow the spiritual and loving light from Jesus to lighten our darkened lives. Jesus' light enables us to become a light to the world; however, if we act like Charlie Brown and Eeyore keeping Jesus' light to ourselves or ignoring its existence, then no one knows it exists.

Today's passage from Isaiah talks about the self-centeredness of the people of Israel as the prophet tells them, "You serve only your own interests. You do not share your bread with the hungry. You do not help the homeless. You do not clothe them. And then you wonder why God looks away and you walk around gloomy all day." The sins of ancient Israel are our sins and we suffer from depression as a body of Christ. We have received the light and yet we keep it to ourselves. We gather between these walls and think the building is the church when in fact we are the church and generations of worshipers have failed to construct a future other than repeating, "woe are we, same problems different year."

As your priest, it is time for this church to repent of its past sins and cry for help. Only a heartfelt cry to God will lift our self imposed yoke of lethargy, finger pointing, and lack of outreach into the 4<sup>th</sup> poorest county in the state. If you and if we as a church do not allow ourselves to be Jesus' Light to our community then our light will fade into darkness and we will continue to be gloomy.

The time is past due for action, you must put your faith into action in order for this body of Christ to be blessed quickly and more powerfully than any generation of worshipers here has ever been blessed. When our faith stands up straight and tall, our walls will be repaired, and our light and service to the

Lord will shine so bright that others come to know God and say, Jesus is truly working thru them to bring His love to a hurting community.

The only question left is, “Are you ready to put your faith into action or do you just want to let it fade away?” Your actions, not your words, will answer that question. So what are you going to do to answer the question?