

Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

SERMON FOR

January 4, 2015

“Let Your Life Shine”



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Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM

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Live Life Fully Alive!

Psalm 147:12-15

Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you. He grants peace within your borders; he fills you with the finest of wheat. He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.

John 1:1-4

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

Let Your Life Shine

Comedian Steven Wright has a warped sense of humor. I love it. He says things like: "I like to skate on the other side of the ice." Steven Wright said, "A friend of mine once sent me a post card with a picture of the entire planet Earth taken from space. On the back it said, 'Wish you were here.'"

Let your life shine. That's what I want to talk with you about today, in hopes that you will let your life shine here on earth. (Like Steven Wright does, in his own peculiar way.) Maybe you already do let your life shine. If so, that's great. Others might not want to let their life shine. They're happy living a dull, boring, mundane life. If that's the kind of life you like to lead, this sermon is not for you. You might want to take a nap for the next few minutes. Although I have to tell you, Jesus doesn't want you to live a dull, boring, mundane life either. Jesus would say: Let your life shine!

Pope Francis lets his life shine. Personally, I think Pope Francis should've been named Time's "Man of the Year." He lives in a modest apartment, instead of the palatial place in the Vatican where he could live. He fired a Bishop for spending millions on renovating the Bishop's residence. He's spoken out in favor of the poor, peace, women, and the environment. He refuses to condemn divorcees. He's said of gays, "Who am I to judge?"

For that statement alone, Elton John says Pope Francis should be named a saint, while he's still alive! Pope Francis says atheists who do good will get to heaven. And he says God is not a Catholic God, God is just God. If Pope Francis one day allows women to become priests and if he allows priests to marry, I just might convert! (Not really.) He's humanizing the Catholic Church. He's democratizing the Catholic Church. He's making the Catholic Church more in the image of Jesus. And he's doing that by letting his life shine. And by living life fully alive!

Live Life Fully Alive! That's my New Year's Resolution. And that's the theme I've chosen for this church for this New Year. What does it mean to Live Life Fully Alive!? It means you don't sleepwalk through your day. It means you don't look like an extra in some Zombie movie. It means you aren't a dead woman or a dead man walking. It means to live a life full of love, joy, and peace. And it means to help others to live a life full of love, joy, and peace. When you Live Life Fully Alive! you can't help but let your life shine. Maybe you Live Life Fully Alive! now, but you didn't always. Maybe you had an abusive childhood that left you feeling dead inside. Maybe you had a loveless marriage that left you feeling dead inside. Maybe you had a dispiriting job that left you feeling dead inside. Maybe you have a hard time putting all that behind you, but you know you have to if you are to Live Life Fully Alive!, because you know that's the only way you can: Let your life shine.

Jesus let his life shine. According to the Gospel of John, from the beginning of Creation, Jesus was the Word of God. John says, "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people." Jesus himself says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Jesus also says, "I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly." And elsewhere Jesus says, "You are the light of the world."

The passage at the start of the Gospel of John is at least the third story of Creation. Genesis 1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Genesis 2 says, "In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens." And then John 1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And the Word was Jesus. God created everything with words, with Jesus. "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." Jesus is the word made flesh. Jesus' word, I think, is life. And light, the light of the world. The opposite of darkness. The opposite of ignorance. Light as in illumination. But also light as in the opposite of heavy. Jesus says, "Come to me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Jesus is the light of the world. The life of the world. And Jesus wants us to let our life shine in the world.

God wants us to let our life shine too. God gives us many gifts to let our life shine, not the least of which is life itself. But that's not all. Psalm 147 says, "God strengthens the bars of your gates (in other words, God protects us); God blesses your children within you (while some of us might be a little too old to have children within us, I think God also blesses the children and grandchildren that we've had). God grants peace within your borders (let's hope that one day God will grant peace outside our borders too)." God does that by sending "out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly." And as we learned in the Gospel of John, Jesus is God's word that runs swiftly.

What if you were the Word of God? If Jesus' word is "life" and "light," what would your word be?

Would your word be life? Or would your word be death? Would your word be light? Or would your word be darkness? Would your word be love? Or would your word be hate? Would your word be goodness? Or would your word be evil? Would your word be truth? Or would your word be lies?

Would your word be courage? Or would your word be fear? Would your word be forgiveness? Or would your word be

revenge? Would your word be justice? Or would your word be injustice? Would your word be peace? Or would your word be war?

If you were the word of God - because, really, you are the word of God, you are at least a word of God - so what would your word be? I would hope that your word would be a positive word of God: Life, Light, Love, Goodness, Truth, Courage, Forgiveness, Justice, Peace. And I would hope that yours would be a positive life, and that you would: Let your life shine.

The Bellamy Brothers had a hit song years ago called, "Let Your Love Flow." The Bellamy Brothers sing, "Let your love fly like a bird on a wing. And let your love bind you to all livin' things. And let your love shine." That's it. Let your love shine. Let your light shine. Let your life shine.

If you make New Year's Resolutions - if you resolve this year to lose weight or read more or not get mad when somebody cuts you off on the 215 - I hope you also resolve this year to let your life shine in 2015. Let your life shine. Let your light shine. Let your love shine. This year and every year. You are here, on this earth (hopefully along with Steven Wright) to survive and thrive and come alive. To Live Life Fully Alive! And to let your life shine for all time.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,
Help us to let our love shine.
Help us to let our light shine.
And help us to let our life shine.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.*

LIVE LIFE FULLY ALIVE!

*“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into God’s presence with singing.”*

Hello, and welcome home to Menifee United Church of Christ. Our goal is to help you Live Life Fully Alive! We’re so happy you’re here. St. Irenaeus, an early church leader, said nearly 2,000 years ago, “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” Maybe he was paraphrasing Jesus who said, “I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.”

To Live Life Fully Alive! means to live in awareness of your body, mind, and spirit: to be aware of the senses of your body (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching); to be aware of the thoughts and feelings of your mind; and to be aware of the spirit within, around, and above you. When God made us in God’s image, God intended us to Live Life Fully Alive! We do that by helping everyone, forgiving everyone, and loving everyone, including ourselves.

At the end of our service I do an “Alter Call.” I don’t call people to the altar. I call people to alter their lives for the better, by answering these questions...

Do you believe in God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit? And do you promise to share the love of God, to follow the teachings of Jesus, and to listen to the Holy Spirit? If so say, I do.

Then I say: Now go! And alter the world for the better! And Live Life Fully Alive! And help others to Live Life Fully Alive!

*“God bless you and keep you
God’s face shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
God’s countenance be lifted up upon you,
and give you peace.”*



*Menifee
United Church of Christ*



*Whoever you are,
Wherever you are on life's journey
You are welcome here!*

*Jesus didn't reject people
Neither do we*



THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you
do not do to others.*
Judaism

*Do to others what you would
have them do to you.*
Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his
brother what he wishes for himself.*
Islam

*Do not do to others
what would cause pain if done to you.*
Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself
would find hurtful.*
Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*
Taoism

*Do not do to others
what you do not want them to do to you.*
Confucianism

*Treat other people
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*
Humanism