

Column – To be a light

A neighbor passed by as I was uncovering my plants following the recent cold snap. She stopped to chat, and in the course of the conversation she said that she was ready to get off the planet, as there was so much meanness and darkness in the world.

My comment back was: “Don’t say that. Your calling and my calling is to be the light.”

The malaise that was affecting my neighbour (who has been hunkered down for over a year as a result of Covid) can also affect churches. The story of a church in Florida comes to mind. People had moved away from the neighbourhood. A nearby plant had closed. A dark cloud hovered overhead.

Then one day by chance (I prefer to think by providence) a copy of the bulletin from the very first service was found behind a filing cabinet. On the cover was the church’s motto: “To be a light in the west end of the city.”

This discovery led to a surge of new life. No longer discouraged and dispirited, members of this church flung open the doors and began letting the light stream out.

If you think about it, “To be a light” is a good motto for any church or individual. Indeed, it is a very Biblical one. The apostle Peter exhorted former pagans who had come to Christian faith with these words:

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” (1 Peter 2:9).

The darkness of which Peter spoke is still very much with us. The legendary radio commentator Paul Harvey said as much over 50 years ago in a broadcast entitled “If I were the devil.” Here are some of his words:

“If I were the prince of darkness, I would want to engulf the whole world in darkness . . . I would not be happy until I had seized the ripest apple on the tree . . . I would set about . . . to take over the United States.”

“I’d subvert the churches first . . . To the young, I would whisper that the Bible is a myth. I would convince the children that man created God instead of the other way around;

“If I were the devil, I’d soon have families at war with themselves, churches at war with themselves and nations at war with themselves until each, in its turn, was consumed.

“I’d peddle narcotics to whom I could . . . I would encourage schools to refine young intellects but neglect to discipline emotions. I’d tell teachers to let those students run at will. And before you knew it, you’d have drug-sniffing dogs and metal detectors at every schoolhouse door.

“I would evict God from the courthouse and the schoolhouse and then from the houses of Congress.

“I’d lure priests and pastors into misusing boys and girls and church money.

“I’d take from those who have and give to those who wanted until I had killed the incentive of the ambitious . . . I’d convince the young that marriage is old-fashioned, that swinging is more fun . . . If I were the devil, I’d just keep right on doing what he’s doing.”

In the intervening years, the devil has not abandoned his mission, if anything the sky has grown darker. Nevertheless, for such a time as this God has placed each of us where we are, namely ‘to be a light’.

“Look behind your ‘filing cabinet’ and rediscover your mission!

LIGHTEN our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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