

## LET'S SHINE A LIGHT!

*1 Peter 2:9-10,*

Did you hear? We who have been called out of darkness into light by our very baptism in Christ, are chosen by God for a great purpose.

*1 John 1:5-7a,*

Did you hear? "God is light and in God there is no darkness". We are called to walk in the light as Christ Jesus is in the light.

*John 8:12, Matthew 5:14-16*

Did you hear? Jesus is the Light of the World and he says to each of us, "you are the light of the world – let your light shine before others."

Today is first Sunday of Epiphany and all the readings, the music, the prayers, the visuals, the candles point to the Star, to the good news that the Light of Christ has come – not just for a few humble shepherds or a few wise travelers – but for everyone, the whole world.

The English word "Epiphany" comes from the Greek word *epiphaneia*, which means "manifestation" or "revealing." The focus of this season in the church year we call Epiphany is the manifestation, the self-revelation of God. God has made God's Self known through Jesus, the Light of the World. And what Jesus reveals is that "God is light and in God, there is no darkness at all." Webster's dictionary defines epiphany as a sudden realization of the essential nature or meaning of something. It's an awakening of sorts that helps us to see and live with new eyes.

With these two definitions in mind what I think this all means for us as people on a journey of faith is that we are called anew to dwell in the Light of Jesus, to live in that Light, to walk in that Light, and to celebrate the Light wherever we see it.

In actuality, this is a high and difficult calling, because of light's opposite – darkness – its presence in our life and world, and it's pull on our hearts, minds, and spirits;

"Although darkness can be very soothing, and romantic ..., it can also be very frightening. (Literally and metaphorically)we (can) lose our way in the dark; ..." <sup>(1)</sup>

In his devotional book, *Living the Message*, Eugene Peterson writes, that in fact "much of life is spent in darkness, whether literal or metaphorical. No one seems completely at home in the dark, even though most us learn to accustom ourselves to it. We invent devices to make the dark less threatening – a candle, a fire, a flashlight, a lamp. In the darkness we are liable to lose perspective and proportion: nightmares terrorize us, fears paralyze us. In the darkness our imaginations fashion specters (threats). Sounds are ominous. Movements are ghostly." <sup>(2)</sup>

He goes on to assure the reader, “Light (though) reveals order and beauty. Or, if there is something to be feared, the light shows the evil in proportionate relationship to all that is not to be feared. We do not live in darkness but in light... (As people on a journey of faith) Light, not darkness, is the fundamental reality in which we live. And God is light”.<sup>(3)</sup> And I would add that it is Christ who reveals God’s Light and it is Christ who calls us to walk in the Light. As scientific tests have shown - we may need darkness to sleep, but we need light to live. That is certainly true for us as biological beings but more so as spiritual beings.

So how might we live and walk in the light, the Light of Christ, in this unfolding, new year? Well, I am pretty sure we cannot banish all the darkness but we can certainly look for the light in the darkness and celebrate the light we see. This is tweaking a bit the two resolutions for the new year I commended to you last Sunday: First, looking for the joy in our lives by being fully present to God and the gifts and blessings of God in the moment; and discovering the joy of being in service to others, thus serving Christ.

Two years ago on Epiphany Sunday many of you received “Star Gift” words and I invited you to ponder your word throughout 2010. Well, on this Epiphany Sunday I am inviting all of us to “shine a light” on all that is good and blessed in our lives, our world, this community of faith, and celebrate it in 2012. About 25 of us so far will have the opportunity to “shine a light” on all that is good and blessed about Knox at the upcoming retreat on Saturday, Jan. 28. And I must tell you that after meeting with the planning team this week, I am very excited about the retreat. It’s going to be fun and illuminating and I believe our imaginations and creativity are going to be sparked and energized as we discern where God may be “shining a light” on our path and directing us in life and ministry in the coming year and as we look toward Knox’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2013.

Now beyond the retreat I have an idea about how we can all be involved in “Shining a Light” in 2012. But first let me tell you how I came to this idea.

Not long ago a Facebook friend posted a link to the “45 Most Powerful Images of 2011”. The collection of images from the year’s news stories served to remind viewers just how many really big events happened in 2011, from natural disasters to citizen protests to legislation to war. Let me share four of those images with you.

1. A woman cries while sitting on a road amid the destroyed city of Natori, in northern Japan after the massive earthquake and tsunami in January. (Reuters / ASAHI SHIMBUN)



2. A man sits in front of a destroyed apartment building following the Joplin, Missouri tornado in May. (Reuters)



3. An aid worker using an iPad captures an image of a dead cow's decomposing carcass in Wajir near the Kenya-Somalia border on July 23. (Reuters / STRINGER)



4. A University of California Davis police officer pepper-sprays students during their sit-in at an "Occupy UCD" demonstration in Davis, California. (Jasna Hodzic)

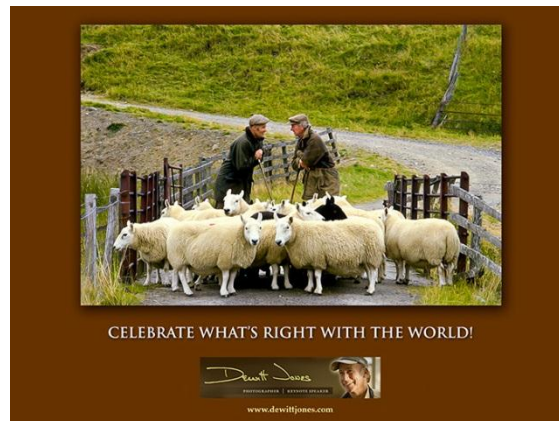


These certainly are all powerful images but for me these images and almost all of the remaining 41 of 45 reflect darkness not light, pain not healing, heartache not love. Wouldn't it be great if somehow the media would direct more attention and energy to documenting the love, the goodness, the caring, the mercy that is present and at work in the world even in times of disaster and tragedy? Wouldn't it be great if somehow more attention and energy were directed to what is good and right in the world?

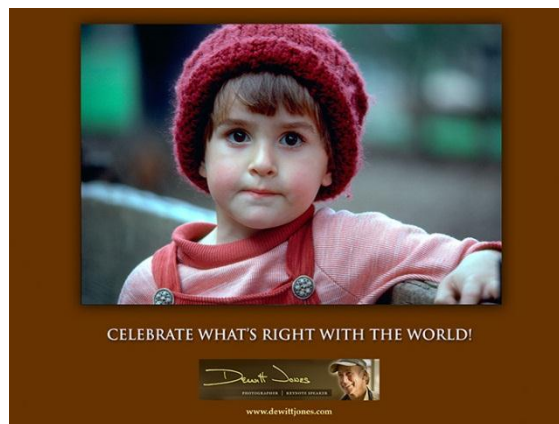
Well, it was just a bit of pondering at the time and I forgot all about it until sharing lunch recently with a good friend from seminary days. She introduced me to the work and passion of Dewitt Jones who is one of America's top professional photographers and a world class photojournalist.

As a much sought after key-note speaker he combines stories from his years at *National Geographic* magazine with his extraordinary photographs to teach both creativity and vision. With words and images he is inspiring thousands to 'Celebrate What's Right With the World'! And this is what really caught my attention. Through his words and images he is "shining a light" on the goodness and beauty that is all around us.

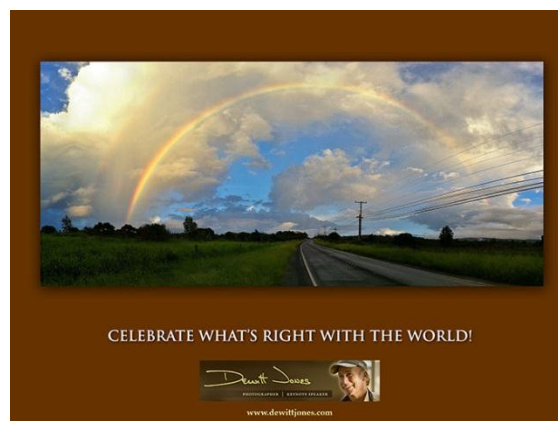
Let me offer some examples of his work: <sup>(4)</sup>



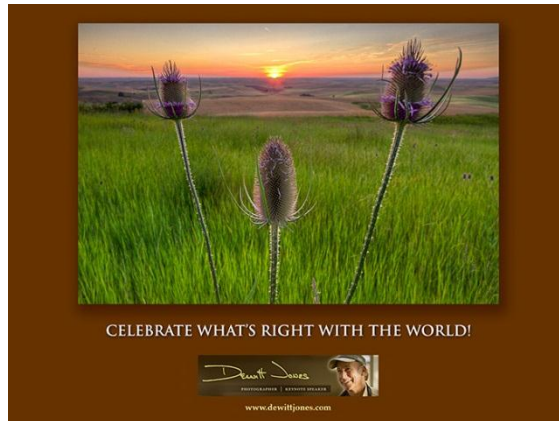
Dewitt's caption for this image reads: "Nothing is more worth celebrating than good conversation with a good friend."



Dewitt writes of this image: "The eyes of a child. The innocence. The openness. The possibilities. What greater gift?"



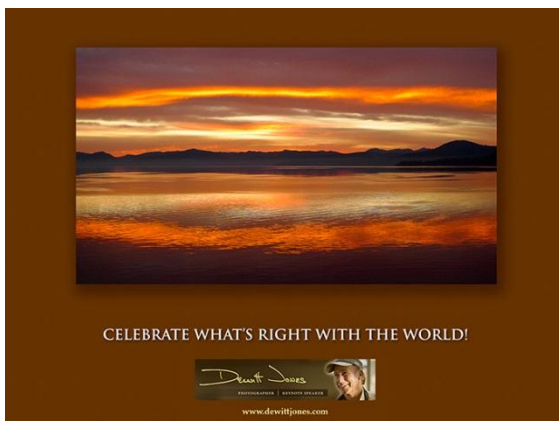
Dewitt writes: "I took this picture on my iPhone. My iPhone! What an astounding time we live in. I'd say the road ahead looks pretty good. ...I'm going. Care to join me?"



Quoting Albert Einstein, "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."



Dewitt writes: "There are days when the only thing to do is to put on your party hat and...Sing! May today be one of those days."



Quoting Thich Nhat Hanh, “The miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on the earth in the present moment; to appreciate the peace and beauty that are available now.”

So here’s my idea: Inspired by Dewitt Jones and his call to “Celebrate What’s Right with the World!” through amazing words and images let’s “Shine a Light” on what’s good and right, beautiful and loving in our lives, our family, our community of faith, our neighborhoods, our world. Let’s be amateur photojournalists this year. Let’s look for the Light and capture these moments with words and pictures this year. Many of you have digital cameras, iPhones, and other cell phones with cameras that can capture such moments and I have purchased some instant cameras for those who do not. Then after capturing the pictures the idea is to reflect on the image and then add a brief caption. It could be your own words, a scripture verse, a poem, a quote.

Let me offer three examples of my amateur photojournalist endeavor:



“Food Pantry: Thursday is the day. Serving is the way.”



“A look a smile, a colorful Christmas bag.”



(sunrise out my front door)

“Palm tree sentinels three. God’s love in a sunrise to see.”

My hope is that throughout the year there will be opportunities to share your photo-journalist endeavors. With the aid of our visual media it would be easy to incorporate into weekly worship and to keep “Shining a Light” all year. We could even add a tab in our new and updated website. We could gather for celebration gatherings, share a simple meal and watch together one of Dewitt Jones’ amazing dvds on vision and creativity.

So friends, in 2012 let’s celebrate what’s right with the world! Through amazing words and images let’s “Shine a Light” on what’s good and right, beautiful and loving in our lives, our family, our community of faith, our neighborhood and our world. Let’s celebrate it and cultivate it.

Have you heard? Our light has come, so arise, lift up your eyes. Shine!

(1) Diane Bergant, “More Light Please,” *Sojourners*, Dec. 23, 2002.

(2) Eugene H. Peterson, “Light”, *Living the Message*, © 1996, pp.101-102

(3) Ibid.

(4) [www.dewittjones.com](http://www.dewittjones.com) and [blog.celebratewhatsright.com](http://blog.celebratewhatsright.com)