

The feel good story of the NFL season has been Tim Tebow. Somehow this Heisman trophy quarterback from Florida in his second season as a quarterback for the Denver Broncos has drawn more attention than even the Green Bay Packers who seem destined to go undefeated and win a second consecutive Super Bowl this year. Turn on ESPN or sports-talk radio and everyone is talking about Tebow.

Love him or hate him, Tim Tebow has single-handedly redefined the football vocabulary in the NFL. Players who scored touchdowns used to just go to a knee and say a silent prayer- now it's known as 'Tebow-ing.' And those amazing two-minute drills that teams would make to come from behind and win are now known as 'Tebow-time.'

Despite all the criticism about his throwing motion and whether or not he deserves to be an NFL quarterback; I think the hardest thing for most people to understand about Tim Tebow is his faith. Sure there have been other outspoken NFL stars who were Christians- Reggie White and Curt Warner to name just two- but Tebow, who used to wear his faith on his eye black in college, has drawn extra scrutiny because his outspoken faith actually matches up with his all-out devotion to Jesus Christ.

Now some of you are probably wondering how all this fits with a message about Jesus birth. Let me draw the connection. Look at John 1:5: "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." John describes the entrance of Jesus into the world using the metaphor of light shining into the darkness. But John also notes a problem; the darkness doesn't understand the light.

The problem that many, especially sports commentators, have with Tebow is that they don't understand this uncommon light in a world that often carries a darker side. Case in point- the Chicago Bears wide-receiver Sam Hurd who this week was arrested on federal drug charges. Hurd reportedly wanted to purchase and distribute large amounts of cocaine and marijuana. Light and dark- a contrast that is all around us- a contrast that often leaves many trying to understand one or the other.

We live in a dark world. Darkness is as close as the two shootings that took two lives this week and in one case left three small children without a mother and a school without a teacher. Darkness is the feeling that gripped us a few weeks ago when 8 teens were killed in two car crashes on back-to-back days. Darkness is a reality that all of us understand all too well.

But Jesus entry into the world through the mystery/miracle called the incarnation was like a light that pierced the darkness and served notice that darkness had met its match! And everywhere that Jesus went the prophesy of Isaiah continued to be realized: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." (Isaiah 9:2)

The blind who had always walked in darkness received their sight as light broke forth upon their eyes. Those who were blinded by sin were released to walk a pathway that was illuminated by the light of God's word. And even some who were covered by the darkness of death were given new life when Jesus spoke their name and called them back from the darkness of death to the light of life.

But many simply didn't understand this light that was breaking into the darkness. As John said, 'men loved darkness instead of light.' (3:19) And so they tried to snuff out the light by killing Jesus and placing him in a dark cold tomb. But the light wasn't about to be extinguished. The Light of Life was resurrected and the light burst the bonds of darkness shining the light on the pathway for all who would follow.

The Good News is that God is with us! Jesus, Emmanuel, is the light of the world; the light that shines in the darkness! And everywhere that Jesus is invited to enter into a person's life the darkness is dispelled.

But here is the important part of the story. In Matthew 5 Jesus says to us: You are the light of the world! Let your light shine!

Each and every one of us as disciples of Jesus are called to proclaim the Good News that Jesus is the light that has entered our world to dispel the darkness. And in a world that has seemingly become darker those of us who are the light of the world need to understand that we have a responsibility to let our light shine.

We've talked about it throughout this Advent season as we've seen how God entered the world in Jesus and so informs the way that you and I are called to enter our world. Let's review real quickly:

Like Jesus we know we can't share the good news unless we first become present with people and identify with them in a way that we enter into an understanding of who they are. Like Jesus we also know that we must enter into the proximity of those with whom we are called to share the good news. Unless we make ourselves genuinely available to others by entering the nitty-gritty of their world we will always be on the outside looking in. And last week, we saw that Jesus exercised humility by becoming powerless and taking on the role of a servant in the life of those he was called to save.

All of that is the preparation for proclaiming the Good News! And the preparation is vital to proclamation!

One reason that so many people are turned off by Christians is because in the past many Christians just went to the proclamation without the presence, proximity and powerlessness that must precede any genuine attempt to proclaim the Good News. You see when we identify with people around us, when we are close enough to really

see and understand who people are and when we willing serve others we are shining the light of Jesus in a dark world- we are setting the stage to proclaim Good News!

The problem is the darkness doesn't understand the light! So our job is to make the light understandable to a world that thinks darkness is the norm.

And there is probably no better time of year than now to tell people the story of this light that shines in the darkness. I remember when Rebekka was a little girl and we were explaining to her the meaning of all the lights at Christmas. We told her that the lights remind people about Jesus. So everywhere we went and saw Christmas lights she would say those people are remembering Jesus!

But it's just not Christmas when the lights point to Jesus. Remember, you are the light of the world! You are a light every day that shines before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16) So when you live your faith beyond Sunday; when you care for the least, the last and the lost; when you live in a way that is consistent with what you believe; then people will want to know what makes you different. That's when we get to proclaim the Good News!

Many people are ok with the shining part; they just fear the proclamation of the Good News. But we can't just live what we say we believe; we need to speak about what we believe. The apostle Peter writing to the Christians in a darkened world said: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." (1 Peter 3:15) And Paul noted the same thing to the Colossians: "Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone." (Colossians 4:5-6)

Being the light that shines in the darkness requires us to make the light understandable to the darkness. And it's really not all that hard! Just tell your story of how the light of Jesus shines in your darkness. It's your story; tell it in a way that lifts up Jesus and makes people wonder if the light can shine in their life.

Now most of us will never have the platform of a Tim Tebow; but we need to be prepared with the story of how God is at work in our life. I'm excited about our upcoming Experiencing God study because it will help us to understand how God is at work in our lives; and not only that but to discern the movement of God in other's lives so that we can enter into their life in a way that God's light will burst forth in their darkness.

One thing I can guarantee you about this week leading up to Christmas; if you are willing to take the time required to be present, to live in proximity with and serve powerlessly among those whom God has placed in your sphere of influence; you will

have the opportunity to proclaim the Good News- to shine the light and to give the reason for the hope that is in you.

Remember that your job this week is to enter the darkness and be a light that brings understanding and life to those who walk in darkness.