

Send Out Your Light and Your Truth  
A sermon preached by Rev. W. Dale Osborne  
October 30, 2011, Binkley Baptist Church  
Lectionary Texts: Psalm 43, Psalm 107: 1-7

(Author's note: I began this sermon with an extemporaneous account of my recent trip to Galax, VA accompanied by Tony Bennett on the radio. This story is only available on the sound version of Sunday's worship.)

This month has two awareness points for people to take note of in their hearts and minds. If I said October is national awareness month for \_\_\_\_\_, blank, how would you fill in the blank? Many of you would likely say Breast Cancer and you would be absolutely correct. Pink is the color of emphasis and many organizations in our community spend a lot of time and money raising awareness about this incredibly challenging disease. A good number of our Binkley members and friends have been directly or indirectly affected by breast cancer. In an attempt to support one another in the midst of treatments, changes in self perception and fears that the disease can cause, a group of women who have lived through breast cancer began meeting monthly for support and encouragement. Pink is the color of Breast Cancer awareness month and pink is the strong and courageous life force flowing through these women and thousands of others who share their connection to the disease. Breast Cancer awareness is certainly a vibrant force in our social psyche.

But what if I asked you to fill in this blank - The first full week in October is national \_\_\_\_\_ blank awareness week? Did you say Mental Illness when you filled in the blanks? If you did, then everyone in the Binkley Brainstormers is feeling a sense of pride and fulfillment. You see, the Binkley Brainstormers have been trying to increase awareness, understanding, education and support for people living with mental illness for several years. In this month when mental illness is emphasized, at least in the first full week, the Brainstormers have tried to increase awareness and provide a welcoming presence at our church for individuals and their families who deal directly with mental illness. For example, a member of the Brainstormers, Christine Jernigan, met with and educated our deacons about how to best support someone in their deacon family group who may be dealing with Bi-polar disorder or severe depression or schizophrenia. Christine shared her personal story as a way of de-mystifying the sometimes confusing world of mental illness. In so doing, Christine was embodying Jesus' example of reaching out to teach people about how to deal with illness. Some other members of the Brainstormers created a section in the library to emphasize and lift up books that are helpful for anyone dealing with mental illness. I hope some of you had a chance to take a look. Their efforts were meant to teach and enlighten all who entered our church so that we might become a more welcoming congregation. God invites us to be welcoming creatures in so many ways. Just walk through our outdoor labyrinth some time and you will observe hundreds of aspects of nature that calmly but clearly say "Welcome", I am glad you are here." God's naturally created elements are full of invitations to welcome and hospitality. Even the stones that line your path during the walk are sources of hospitable and solid guidance. Finally, just two short weeks ago, the Brainstormers organized and hosted Dr. Gary Duncan in our church's Fellowship Hall and Sanctuary. The dessert treats were quite a yummy feast for our tummies while Dr. Duncan's engaging lecture on the workings of the human brain were fascinating. He spoke from his heart and his mind. His lecture allowed us to remember that Mental Illness is a physical disease, a brain disease that should be afforded the same compassion and creative support that any other disease holds. I do not think mental illness awareness week in October has a special color attached to it. For some reason it only gets a week of emphasis in our nation. At this church however, mental illnesses, brain diseases, and the people who are affected by them are every bit as valuable and important as any other person's disease. We work to diminish the stigma of brain diseases like addiction and other mental illnesses by opening our doors very wide to 12 step support groups and support groups for people who struggle with bi-polar disorder, severe depression and schizophrenia. This open door Monday through Saturday practice should never end on Sunday morning during the worship hour. People struggling to find compassion and struggling to share their beautiful gifts must always be welcomed in our sanctuary. They may not have a special color, but they should always have a voice.

Since I wanted to emphasize mental illness in worship today I chose to place several pieces of Vincent Van Gogh throughout our bulletin. Van Gogh, born in the Netherlands in 1853 was a brilliant man who painted with incredible color strength and human perception. He also suffered from mental illness and spent a portion of his adult life under the care of medical professionals in a sanitarium. His paintings are priceless treasures in today's art world but he only sold one during his lifetime. While I am constantly amazed and enthused by his colorful brushstrokes, I am equally amazed by the words he put to paper, especially while writing to his brother Theo. The piece I selected for the Becoming Aware portion of the bulletin is especially inspiring to me. The compassionate artist writes, "I feel such creative power in myself that I know for sure that the time will arrive when, so to speak, I shall regularly make something good every day. But very rarely a day passes that I do not make something, though it is not yet the real thing I want to make." I believe his masterful words express a universal yearning that is either dormant or prominent in every human being. We desire to "make something good" every day even if each day brings something that is not quite the "real" thing we hope to create. I believe that as long as we allow ourselves the leniency and thoughtfulness to make something good each and every day, eventually that something may become very real, if not to us, then perhaps to someone who passes by and sees our creation after we are gone. The work of an artist and writer like Vincent van Gogh points us toward the creative genius that is in each and every one of us. Please know, that what you are creating today, what we as a church community are creating today, what God in infinite compassion is creating today, can take us to a place of very tangible hope and justice.

The poetic psalmist creative writing in today's reading reflects prayerfully on this tangible hope. The poet writes in the 43<sup>rd</sup> psalm, "Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people; from those who are deceitful and unjust deliver me! For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you cast me off? Why must I walk about mournfully because of the oppression of the enemy? O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise God, my help."

Send out your light and your truth. Strong words from someone who had felt the pain of oppression and the disdain of disapproving eyes. Strong words from a creative poet who surely knew the anxiety of inhospitality in his synagogue, village or countryside. The poet took refuge in God. The poet took refuge in God who offers hospitality. The poet took refuge in God's truth and light and responded to the refuge with a song, a hymn of praise for all to hear. As a human being we are asked to hold up the light and truth of God's hospitality. As a church we are encouraged to hold up the light and truth of God's hospitality. As a nation, we will surely grow stronger if we hold up the light and truth of God's hospitality.

I want to conclude this sermon with a current event reflection that seems appropriate to my title, Send Out Your Light and Truth. Most of you know that the inspiring French Sculptor's gift to our nation celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> birthday off the coast of New York and New Jersey this week. Hear now the poem Emma Lazarus wrote to grace Lady Liberty's frame.

#### The New Colossus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand  
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes  
command

The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she  
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Now brothers and sisters, how will you send out your light and truth?