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The Light shines in the darkness

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It is important that we do not lose faith in the presence of God in our world.

Victor Frankl, survivor of a Nazi concentration camp in World War II, noted the desperate need that all human beings have for hope. Hope keeps us alive. In the concentration camps especially, the prisoners needed to have some hope of rescue. Their hopes for a rescue became especially fervent around Christmas time. Everyone dreamed of going home for Christmas. As Christmas neared, the prisoners stopped complaining about lack of food, beatings, freezing temperatures, and all the other inhuman practices they endured. They focused on the hope of going home.

But then Christmas came and went with no rescue. Some prisoners committed suicide. Some just stopped getting out of bed or eating, and one morning simply didn't wake up. It was as if they had willed themselves to die.

Six months later, when Allied soldiers liberated the prisoners, they found that almost half of the prisoner population had died since Christmas. They could not live without hope.

There are hard times in all of our lives. There are times when we find ourselves walking in darkness. Death in the family. Death of a marriage. Disappointment in someone we admire. A terrifying diagnosis in the doctor's office. Problems at school. Rejection by our friends.

The Scriptures tell us, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." (Isaiah 9:2) In the midst of our darkneses, it's important that we don't lose hope, that we don't lose faith. We must keep going and believe that we will see a great light.

In another WWII prison camp, one of the prisoners had a candle which he guarded with care. Made of wax and animal fat, it provided a potentially life-saving nourishment in a situation where starvation was common.

One morning, a fellow prisoner announced to the camp, "Tomorrow is Christmas Eve." And as prisoners in concentration camps did every year, someone commented, "Next year, we will be home for Christmas." One prisoner, lost for a moment in happier memories, whispered, "At Christmas time, candles burn and bells ring." The other men nodded, savoring the treasured memories.

That comment worked a profound change in the heart of the prisoner with the candle. That night, when the camp barracks were dark, he slipped outside. He returned to the bunkhouse with one glowing ember from the fire pit. He set up his treasured tallow candle on a crate and lit it with the burning ember. Soon, all the men in the bunkhouse had gathered around. The light reflected off bony shoulders and hollowed cheeks, but the eyes of the prisoners were filled with the light of that candle. The light from the candle filled the whole bunkhouse. None of the men had seen a candle glow so brilliantly as that half-eaten candle did. A priest broke the reverent silence to remark, "It is Christmas. The light shines in darkness." And a fellow prisoner added: "And the darkness comprehended it not." The following year, those prisoners were home for Christmas. Some went home to resume their lives. Some went home to be with the Lord, and to the life that is truly life. Every Christmas, however, those who survived remembered the gift of light that shone even in the darkest places.

There is a light that will shine even in our darkest places. This is the amazing promise of Christmas-- God has not forgotten us nor forsaken us. In fact, God has become one of us.