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As you know, I have been sorting through a lot of stuff these last several weeks in anticipation of our move to North Liberty in August. While I moved many times in my college and post-college years, I haven't moved since June 20, 2001, when we moved here over 13 years ago. A person can accumulate a lot of stuff in thirteen years.

Anyway, yesterday I was making a concerted attempt to sort through things in my cellar. After a few trips up and down the steps, I realized that I had never turned the light switch on. And yet, strangely, I had been able to see just fine while sorting through things. Why was it so bright, I wondered, even in the late afternoon? I stood up straight and looked through the window in the door that opens to the east and squinted in the late afternoon sun. And then it dawned on me...the tree is gone. The property guys had been at the parsonage earlier that morning to remove that super tall, leaning evergreen tree that had been damaged by this week's terrible storm (a heartfelt thank you to all the folks who labored to remove that tree).

What this meant was that where once a huge tree stood to block the basement from the afternoon sun, now there was nothing....nothing to block the sunlight from streaming into my dark basement. Interesting, as I looked around.

At first, I was horrified, because I've always known that my cellar isn't the cleanest part of the house, but this bright light now revealed that it really is awful...dusty, cobwebby corners once hidden by darkness now were plain as day. That's ok, I consoled myself, because it's a cellar, after all, and it's only used for storage. But as I looked around in the now-bright cellar, I also discovered things I had completely forgotten about...

I found an ugly blue glass platter a dear friend from Birmingham, Alabama, had given me long ago.

I found an orange paper pumpkin one of the boys had made in preschool.

I found a stack of birthday cards from my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday (those fall in the category of artifacts)...

I'm sure you have interesting treasures, too, in your cellar...secret things hidden in the darkness, some scary things, some precious things, some ugly things.

This was an interesting afternoon, this newly illumined cellar experience, and it made me think of today's Gospel, where Jesus is preaching to the crowds, encouraging them to not be afraid of God...that all those things we try to hide in the dark will be revealed by the light of God's justice.

There are two sides to this announcement.

On the one hand, it's good news, because there is relief in laying down the burdens we carry on our consciences...there is relief that God sees and knows all we've done and thoughts and schemes and tried to hide from him. There is relief in realizing it's a silly, futile game to try to hide our nastiness from God.

On the other hand, this is a scary thing, and makes God seem like some sort of KGB agent with a terrifying spotlight who interrogates us and scares us until we finally break down and confess our sins to him. This can make us feel like God is out to get us, that God exists only to reveal those dark corners of our soul that hide our darkest, most intimate secrets.

God's justice is about both, Jesus explains.

God desires for us to bring to him everything that weighs heavy on our hearts, but God doesn't want this just so he can watch us squirm. God wants this so that we can live in the freedom he intends for us...and so he sheds the light of his justices on those dark corners, revealing all the crud we try so hard to hide, like that tree used to do to my cellar.

But sometimes dead and damaged things need to be cut down, like that tree. And so God removes from us all those dead and damaged parts of us that stand in the way of his light. God removes our sins from us, as far as the east is from the west. And when he does this, light streams into our

hearts, bright and beautiful, like the afternoon sun in June.

The most important piece of Jesus' sermon in all this is to not fear. He says it a couple of times in this reading, even—don't be afraid. Trust God to clear away those things that need to be cleared away in order for light to fill those darkened places within you. Yes, cruddy things will be revealed in your heart and in mine, but so will hidden treasures....beautiful things you have completely forgotten about...joy and peace and a freedom from all those dark places that used to scare you, but don't anymore.