

"Righteousness exalteth a nation."

-- Proverbs 14:34

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Easter 2015

Dear Friends:

This Bible verse in the old King James version has been boldly displayed on the front of Washington Street Mission for as long as anyone can remember. We see it every time we enter the building. During this Easter season it takes on special significance and it is appropriate for us to pause and reflect on its message.

When this Bible verse was first posted at the Mission, we were located in a notorious area of Springfield known as the "levee district." It was noted for saloons, brothels, crime, corruption, and a variety of similar disreputable activity. It was hardly known for righteousness.

Famed evangelist Billy Sunday, whose 1909 meetings in Springfield provided significant inspiration for the founding of the Mission the next year, often spoke against "demon rum" and the evils of alcoholism. He frequently lamented the family breakdown that he saw as the result of social evils. He believed that we were engaged in a war being waged for the soul of our country, a battle for righteousness that would lift up our nation.

But the Mission's message is not and never was simply a crusade for moral reform. We have always known that the lack of righteousness in our nation, in our neighborhoods, and in ourselves goes much deeper. We understand that our need for righteousness points to our need for Jesus. He died and rose to life in order to give us his righteousness.



Badly worn and barely visible unless you know where to look for it, this old sign still hangs on the side of the Mission building. It was moved from the original Mission site when the Mission was relocated in 1974. A new sign on the front of the building carries the same message.

That's why the idea of righteousness carries special significance for us during the Easter season. Only the death and resurrection of Jesus make righteousness possible. His death atones for our sin and our guilt and the new life his resurrection brings opens up the possibility of a life of righteousness -- not sinless perfection, but allowing Jesus to live in and through us.

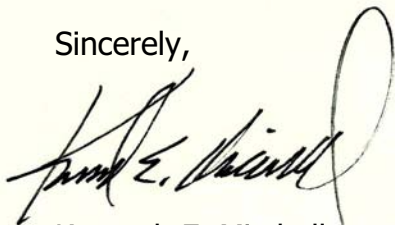
Perhaps the idea is best expressed in something Paul wrote: "God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Think about that for a while. The righteousness that we proclaim is made possible because Jesus died for us. It is the righteousness of Easter.

Let's look back at that verse posted above the front door at the Mission. It has become so familiar and seems so quaint in its King James language: "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." It might help us to consider a different translation. Look at the simple and straight-forward rendering in the New Living Translation: "Godliness makes a nation great, but sin is a disgrace to any people."

I like the way Eugene Peterson has translated it in *The Message*: "God-devotion makes a country strong; God-avoidance leaves people weak." The Mission points toward God's righteousness, not our own. It draws people to seek him, instead of avoiding him. We do not lift up ourselves as righteous or our nation as righteous, but by our words and our actions we point each person we encounter -- regardless of their condition -- toward the righteousness that Jesus makes possible, a righteousness that will truly lift up a nation.

We invite you to join us in proclaiming this message. Your generous support especially during this Easter season is essential. Please give as God leads you and continue to pray that we will be a beacon to the righteousness of God in this dark world.

Sincerely,



Kenneth E. Mitchell
Executive Director



A frequent guest at the Mission during the morning coffee hours, Richard stands in front of the Mission entrance in his typical attire. The new sign still proclaims the message that "righteousness exalteth a nation."

Our Mission

To share the love of Jesus Christ with the people of Springfield by providing