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**The Light Shines On**

Have you ever felt so far from God’s peace that you couldn’t even imagine it?

Natalie Pisarcik testified during Sunday worship in her home congregation, First Presbyterian Church of Boonton, New Jersey, that she was in that place. A place so dark that she was ready to end her pain. Ready to take her own life. But then, there was light. She recalls, “A beam of warm sunlight hit my face. It was at this exact moment that I realized I had a made a terrible mistake. It was like God was saying to me, ‘What are you doing? You have a reason to live.’ I was so overcome.”

God’s peace shone down in Natalie’s place of turmoil. *And the light shines on.*

Tom Elander, a member of Brentwood Presbyterian Church in West Los Angeles, was shocked at what he saw firsthand at the southern border. “I walked away with a much greater appreciation for how difficult life is for many people from Mexico and Central America who are desperate to escape the misery of their lives — whether from poverty, violence, lack of education or lack of opportunity.”

His four-day experience as part of a Presbyterian Peacemaking Program travel study shed a new light of understanding. *And the light shines on.*

Nada Raphael’s world exploded. A devastating blast that tore through the port area of Beirut left hundreds dead, thousands injured and an estimated 300,000 people homeless. Nada, a Lebanese-born artist, said, “I felt the aftermath of the explosion in every bone of my body and I wanted to show this with my art. I want to make sure we will remember.” *And the light shines on.*

Three stories. So different from each other but in each, God’s light — God’s peace — extends into the lives of Natalie, of Tom, and of Nada, at some time and in some way. And in each case, that light shines back to us in the Church, through our gifts to the Peace & Global Witness Offering. This Offering supports empowering ministries that are rays of light — illuminating both the sources of strife, as well as efforts toward healing and wholeness. Half of the Offering goes to the Mission Agency to partner with ministries around the world like NABAD, a program in Lebanon that aims to empower artists like Nada cope with trauma through creative expression and points us to God’s peace-creating presence in our midst. Twenty-five percent is retained by congregations for local peace and reconciliation work. Natalie’s congregation used their portion to address the growing mental health and suicide crisis in their community. And 25% goes to mid councils for peacemaking ministries on the regional level like Tom experienced at the southern border. Our own church has used our portion of the offering (TO DO WHAT? AND WHY THAT IS IMPORTANT and MEANINGFUL TO YOUR CONGREGATION).

Through our gifts, we draw closer to God’s peace, and shine God’s light at this time and in these ways, trusting in the God of peace, at all times and in all ways. Because when we all do a little, it adds up to a lot. Please give generously.

***Let us pray:***

*Break forth in us, Light of peace, Light of the world. May your peace extend from our mouths, from our hearts and from our hands until it exists, at all times, in all ways.* ***Amen****.*