

## Sermon

December 13, 2020, Third Sunday of Advent

John 1: 6-8. 19-28

When I was a young girl, about 10 years old or so, my family and I went on a summer holiday to the Black Hills in South Dakota. While there my parents took us to visit the Jewel Cave. This was completely fascinating; I had never been in a cave before and this was a big cave. At some point in our tour the guide wanted to impress on us what it would be like to be in complete darkness because we are so used to constant light either natural or artificial. I remember in those few minutes of no light feeling almost unconnected to myself, I couldn't even see my hand when holding it up to my face and when the lights came back on my eyes seemed to ache with the effort of trying to gather some speck of light so that I could see my hand or something. But in the first moments of illumination I saw my parents, my sisters and all the other people that were part of our group and we smiled at one another and nervously laughed at the experience. The darkness momentarily separated us not only from ourselves but from one another.

In the summer of 1987 we travelled from our home in Ft. St. John, to Fairbanks, AK where some of my husband's family was living at the time. We headed up the Alaska Highway with a baby, toddler, a pre-schooler and a great big old Starcraft tent trailer. Ahead and behind us drove other family members with their kids and babies, and various sorts of mobile accommodations. Three days later we arrived, it was family reunion time! The remarkable thing was we pulled in the driveway at 1:00 AM, and it was bright outside, almost like the middle of the afternoon.

Children were awake, adults alert, we excitedly gathered outside reveling in the midnight sun and its energy as well as in the celebration of being together.

Darkness and light, powerful experiences and forces in our natural world and powerful images or metaphors we use in life and faith. The Gospel of John is rich in the use of the basic elements of our environment and daily life, the **Word** was God, Jesus is the **Light** of the World, **Lamb** of God, and **Bread** of Life. While this Gospel emphasizes the divinity of Jesus more so than the other three gospels the author also uses these powerful symbols of the cosmos and human experience. John wants the readers to know that God, Creator and Source of all comes to us as fully human in Jesus, in our humanity and in the created world. In the gospel reading the man called John, sent from God, is a witness to the light. ...He came to testify to the light.

Tom Harper, former Anglican priest, professor at U of T and Internationally recognized writer on religious and ethical issues writes; "There are two important ways in which this can be illustrated. The first is the cosmic connection; the second is the Light beyond all light. There's a deeply spiritual chord here that resonates with the essence of every creature and organism on our planet." The rhythms of the sun and light throughout the year provide for our very existence and that there is a source for that reality also permeates our spiritual tradition. Again, Harper writes; "The world over, the ubiquitous metaphor for God, the most potent and accessible picture to hold in mind when people think about or pray to God, is a light beyond all light. Thus, when the Psalmist says, 'The Lord is my light and my salvations,' or the prophet Isaiah writes, 'arise, shine, for your

light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you...,' they are voicing a profound insight. The Source of all things is wrapped and bathed in 'light inaccessible, hid from our eyes.' As the hymn writer says. He goes on: 'It's only the splendor of light hideth thee.'"

This is what John came to testify to, to point to. The gospel writer simply said John was "a man sent from God..." but we remember him from Mark as a really rugged, crusty guy; one, who as Glenn described last week, we would not want to meet in a dark alley, or for whom we give really wide berth on the city sidewalk. He does not wear fine suits or frequent high end restaurants. He wears camel hair, a leather belt, eats locusts (full of protein by the way) and wild honey. By simply saying he is a man the author of John located him firmly in his earthly humanity. After a game of 20 questions with the priests and Levites; the answers are no, no and no, he is not the Messiah, or Elijah or the prophet...the Jewish authorities are desperate for a saviour to release them from the turmoil of their times. The man John is sent to simply testify to the presence of Jesus, the one who is coming, who stands among them and they do not know. John points his hairy finger to that light which is heavenly, not of this earth, which comes to earth anyway in the form of Jesus, "the Word became flesh." (John 1:14) In verse 27 the gospel writer nods to Jesus' humanity, (because in the book of John there is no manger scene or even mention of Mary and Joseph); John the one who testifies says; "Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." The dusty, scuffed up pieces of leather, animal skin, strapped onto the feet that traverse the rocky paths and muddy earth day after day. In the Gospel of John, the sole

purpose of this man named John is to witness to the Light, to the Light beyond the light. To a sandal wearing man named Jesus, and whose mom is Mary, who is called the Light of the World.

Using the language of Tom Harper we know the power of the cosmic realities of darkness and light. As a child the darkness of the cave was complete, my eyes ached trying to find some speck of light to illumine my hand in from of my face. The light of the midnight sun in the far north provided energy and wakefulness that sustained us in the middle of that summer night. In our lives we use the metaphor of darkness in our experiences of illness, loss and grief, unemployment; isolation and loneliness, confusion and uncertainty, fear can overwhelm and we may wonder if there will be release from the darkness. Where is the Light? We long to have an end to the COVID-19 pandemic to be able to visit and hug friends and family members. Where is the Light?

Verse 9 in this first chapter of John is not part of the lectionary reading for today, it reads, "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." We are enlightened, created by God in the image of God; John alludes to the creation in Genesis. When we open our eyes we will see Light of Christ, the Light beyond the light in those around us. We are called to be the Light of Christ to those who look to us.

We have acknowledged the brokenness and despair in the world and in our lives. In this season of Advent we acknowledge the darkness, BUT, and that's a big BUT when we open our eyes and our hearts we see, feel and hear the light and love of

God coming to us, and are called to be pointers to the coming light, to testify to the Light beyond the light that is Christ Jesus.

Today, the third Sunday of Advent, light the candles in your home, acknowledge the cosmic light and the Light beyond the light. Bask in the Light that is the presence of our generous and loving God, as we await with joy the coming of God Incarnate. Amen