



**THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 13, 2020
JOHN 1: 6-8, 19-28
“BE THE LIGHT”**

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

Now this was John’s testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Messiah.”

They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?”

He said, “I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet?”

He answered, “No.”

Finally, they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

Now the Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

“I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”

This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

SERMON

I woke up early this morning to finish my sermon.

I had gone to bed early last night having written about half of the sermon.

I got up, went to my computer and discovered the computer had restarted after it had been automatically backed up.

But I had not saved my sermon and it was gone.



I was sick.

I had started that sermon with the statement that I was weary of COVID-19.

A lost sermon just added to my weariness.

My mind was a jumble, caught between trying to remember what I had written or just starting over with a new sermon.

Frantically, I tried everything I knew to find the unsaved sermon, but no luck.

And so here we are.

With a sermon entitled “Be the Light.”

What a joke. That’s the last thing I am feeling.

I am completely bummed out.

It feels like I have nothing to offer.

This week I had a dream with a series of vignettes.

A therapist friend was telling me that I was wrong about something. I was in the wrong class at college. The professor had to show me the way around the university I was attending because I couldn’t find my way. Then I was on the wrong path.

The dream’s theme was “I am lost.”

That seems about right.

As pastor, I make a hundred decisions a week, but what do I know? I have never been a pastor in a pandemic. There is no roadmap.

What about you? How are you feeling?

Aren’t you weary of COVID-19? Hearing about it. Worrying about it?

Yesterday we hit the marker of 3,000 people dead in one day.

Our congressional leaders don’t lead. While one family buys a \$30 million lot in a private community millions are on the verge of losing their homes. That’s insane.



Our congressional leaders fight among themselves about a stimulus bill while every day we receive phone calls from families who can't buy food or Christmas presents for their children.

How are you doing managing your job? Likely at home. Or working somewhere where you don't feel safe. Supervising your children at home with school being in front of a computer. It's all new. The world we knew is gone. Whatever we become in the future it will not be like the world we knew.

Yeah, we're lost.

I was grateful to receive a Christmas card that read: "we've learned that working from home is possible if you hide from the kids, homeschooling works best when candy is involved, and our dog Henry does not like wearing a mask. But we are also learning to find joy in little moments and remember what truly matters. We can't wait to see your faces again."

A little humor and hope always helps.

And you know what? Acknowledging that I am lost actually made me feel a little better....

And so, I gathered up my music for today's worship, checking to see if I had all the songs. Didn't want another screwup. Just touching the sheet music made me feel better. I looked forward to playing with my compadres.

I got up from my computer, went downstairs and said good morning to deb and the dogs. I put on my coat and took Hana out for her morning walk.

And I started to feel a little better.

One of the things I love about Pittsburgh is that people say hello to one another and stop and talk. I greeted a few people, wished them good morning. Two women stopped me and asked about the other dog. I told them about putting having to put Lucas down and getting a puppy. A lovely conversation.

And I thought, "we are Christ to one another." There is a light in every one of us. And we kindle that light in one another. And that light is Christ.

There is a light in each of us that only darkness can illuminate.

When my pathetic little ego knowledges it is lost, then the light can find me.

This is what saint Paul means when he writes, "I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong."

There it is. When I am lost in the darkness, the light that is Christ in me becomes known.



There is a God, and it is not me! Life is not about us; we are about the project of finding life. Let's remind ourselves of the pattern of spiritual maturity.

The world we knew was an ordered world for us, right?

We knew our work schedules. We had our well-worn routines. Whenever we wanted, we went to the grocery store, shopping, out to eat, taking the kids to school, getting together with friends, going to church. Whatever whenever.

We didn't think about it because we were in control. Life was in our hands.

And then the pandemic. Which threw us into liminal time and space. We were dislodged from all that was structured, routine and in our control.

Liminal comes from the Latin word "limen," meaning doorway or threshold. It is that physical space between rooms.

We are living in a time betwixt and between. We have left the world that we knew, and we are not yet in a new world.

In this time and space anything can happen and does happen.

We wander. We are lost. We are in the darkness.

Yet Christ the light is with us in the dark. As John says, "the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it."

Faith declares there is light in our liminal darkness. The light is in you and in me. The light of Christ.

Within each of us is the precious sanctuary of our soul, a holy place, the divine center, a light to which we can return.

On my walk, all it took was me, a stranger, smiling and saying good morning to another stranger who smiled at me and returned a smile for me to catch a glimmer of the light within each of us.

I knew that all it was going to take was to sit down at the piano and look across to Pat, Jason and Troy and up at Paul to be touched by their light.

Christ does not offer rational certitude. Spiritual reality is elusive. Christ offers us something much better, an entirely different way of knowing: an intimate relationship, a dark journey, a path where we must discover for ourselves that grace, love, mercy, and forgiveness are absolutely necessary for survival in an uncertain world. We only need enough light to know how to live without certitude!



Yes, we really are saved by faith. When we live in this way we never stop growing, we are not easily defeated, we are wise and compassionate, and frankly, we can be fun to live with.

The light of Christ within can put us back in our right minds rather than our wrong egos.

Remember ego is an acronym for edging God out. When we get up in our heads and all lost and dark, God goes out the window.

When we get outside of ourselves our world expands into the wonderful universe it is even when burdened with the pandemic.

We can trust that this dark journey will lead to the light of a new day and a new world. And yes, we will struggle to put our lives back together in some structured and routine way, but we will.

As I am writing this, I am no longer feeling the despair and dejection I was feeling when I first sat down at my computer.

And it helps that our puppy, buddy, is sleeping in his bed at my feet.

It reminds me of how important it is to remember that it is a fact we have feelings. Feelings are not facts.

Or as they say in twelve step groups: don't go into your head alone.

This morning, each ray of light began to erase the darkness. Greeting deb, and the dogs, seeing them play with each other, walking Hana, greeting strangers, the lights on Debbie belcher's house. Anticipating playing music, beginning to experience this sermon come to me. It may be lousy, but it is being written!

And so here we are—the third Sunday of advent.

The world “advent” means coming. What a perfect season for us to be in liminal space. It, whatever it is, is not here. It is coming.

Advent is the season when light and life are fading. The cold is upon us. The days are short, and the nights are long. The ancient church saw this as a time—for four weeks—to fast, give, and pray. These are all ways to strip us down to the bare necessities.

To expose our fear of the dark in order to know what Christ calls “the one thing necessary.” That there is one among us, around us and within us who is the source of life and light.

My friends, times are tough. Life can threaten to break us down.



Remember. Christ is light. That Christ light is within you. You are yourself light to others. And no darkness can put out this light, especially in the darkest times.

We are all connected one to another like a strand of Christmas lights that cannot be extinguished.

Be the light.

SERMON SONG: HEARTLIGHT (NEIL DIAMOND)