

Rev. Lynne Ogren
December 13, 2020

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT
3rd Sunday of Advent, Year B

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. Amen

When I was a child, I was afraid of the dark. I wanted my bedroom door left open and the hall light on when I went to bed at night. I would flip on the lights in a dark room before going in. I don't know if that had anything to do with having two brothers who loved to jump out and scare me, or my own overactive imagination. But I could not trust what might be lurking the dark.

I imagine some of you were curious about the lack of light in our sanctuary this morning. We still have plenty of light coming in through the windows, but without the overhead lights, there is a kind of shadow over us this morning.

When the priests and Levites came to interrogate John in our gospel lesson, they came under a cloud of suspicion. He had caught their attention, probably by the crowds who gathered to be baptized by him. So, they pulled him aside, and in the darkness of their lack of understanding they asked him who he was, with a tone of accusation rather than the hope that he might actually be some fulfillment of God's promises.

The other gospels point out John's ministry as a baptism of repentance, which is the act of exposing to the light the things we would rather keep in the dark. But in this gospel, the darkness is about not knowing Jesus Christ. John's role is to stay out of the spotlight and point it toward Jesus—"the true light, who enlightens everyone..." (1:9)

As I mentioned at the beginning of worship today, this time of year can be particularly dark for many people. As the daylight lessens in our part of the world, the extended darkness can overshadow our emotional well-being. For some, the darkness of broken relationships, and the separations we are experiencing this year, is taking its toll.

The festive, joyful nature of the Christmas season is like looking into those extra-bright halogen headlights on a rural highway at night. It's too much, it's invasive, and it makes us want to retreat to the darkness of our disappointments, pain, or struggle.

In John's gospel, the light of Christ grows gradually for those who come to know him. The Pharisee Nicodemus comes to Jesus looking for answers to his questions. In the darkness of night, Nicodemus' doubts are slowly revealed by the light of Jesus, and over the course of this gospel Nicodemus comes to believe in him. (John 3, 7 & 19)

At the noon of day, Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman drawing water from a well. He brings light to the darkness of her shame and isolation, transforming them into faith and reconciliation. (John 4)

Not all will see the light of Jesus as a welcome light. Some will remain in the darkness of their unbelief and self-importance. But for some, like Nicodemus, the light of a relationship with Jesus and faith in him as Christ, the Messiah, will glow brighter and brighter.

This morning the light in our sanctuary has been growing little by little. After the words of our confession the candles of our Advent wreath expressed the light of God's forgiveness and faithfulness to us.

With each reading of the word, the light grew, and will become even brighter as we meet Christ at the Lord's table. We may not be as bold as John the baptizer to serve so publicly as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" but we can share the light of faith and hope we have from our relationship with Jesus Christ in our own ways.

We do not need to be afraid of the dark because we have the light of Christ, who came into the world to know us and love us with the intense and never fading love of God. We can make space with one another to name that which wants to hide in the dark, our challenges and struggles, our doubts, fears, and pain, and bring them into the light of Jesus Christ, our hope and truest joy.

This year we will not gather on Christmas Eve and light our candles during the reading of the first verses of John's gospel and the singing of Silent Night. So, this morning, as we listen to the musical offering, we will light our candles. I invite you to meditate on where the light of Christ shines for you these days, and how you might be the voice that shines the light of Christ into someone else's darkness.

Thanks be to God. Amen