

Advent Week 3 Reflection

Pr. Nicole Hanson-Lynn December 12-13

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Psalm 126

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the giver and sustainer of our faith, the Holy Spirit.

Does this gospel reading sound familiar? We read a really similar passage last week from Mark. We heard the opening of Mark's gospel: the announcement of the beginning and the description of John the Baptizer's ministry. Today, we read of the same man, but the gospel of John gives this John a different title; he is not "the Baptist," but rather, "the Witness."

For this gospel writer, John's defining role is his witness to Christ. John came to testify to the light, so that all might come to believe through him. But John will not be the only witness in this gospel. Witness is a huge theme of the gospel of John. Witness both in the sense of one who observes and in the sense of one who testifies to what has been observed. Seeing and sharing. This gospel is full of examples of witnesses to Christ

And this is our role, too. To testify to the light. To prepare the way of the Lord.

At this time of year, we have so many beautiful images as metaphors for the light. As we approach the longest night of the year, we look forward to earlier sunrises and later sunsets. We look forward to increasing daylight, to the ability to see more. We also know the power of a single candle against the night. Even more so the power of a sanctuary full of candles as we sing "Silent Night."

But even at other times of the year, we humans are drawn to light. When my parents went to concerts as young adults, it was common for people to bring lighters, and to have an auditorium full of people waving lighters during the concerts. Now, when I have gone to concerts, it's transitioned to phones. Turning the phone screen on, and waving it as a point of light. Even in auditoriums with bright lights, lasers, light shows, we still feel the urge to add our own light.

We know the beauty of a campfire on a summer evening. Fireworks lighting up the night sky. The full moon reflecting off snow. The glow of the Northern Lights. A light by the front door. Even a night light in the hallway to help us make our way around the house at night.

I could go on, and I'm sure you can add your own favorite images of a light in the darkness.

But of course, all these images and metaphors fall short of the light in the gospel of John. We don't have anything big enough to describe it; we do the best we can with the limitations of human language, but we know that the light we are called to witness is greater. We know that we see this light the clearest in the darkest nights.

Before we can testify to the light, we need to recognize it when we see it.

Oftentimes, we see it in hindsight. It is in reflection, many years later, that we recognize the presence of God in the moment. And we practice disciplines that will help us to recognize God's actions in the moment. Reading scripture, praying, serving neighbor, meditating... these are all disciplines that help us to practice seeing the light that shines in the darkness.

As our year comes to the longest night, and as we prepare to celebrate and remember the birth of Christ, the light coming into the world, we do so in a year that feels a lot like stumbling around in the dark. We're trying to figure things out; we're not quite sure where we're headed. But we have this promise and this call: the promise that God is with us, the promise that the light does shine in the darkness. And the call to proclaim that light, to testify to Christ's presence in our midst.

Announcements

Thank you to everyone continuing their financial support. Your stewardship and discipleship are faithful witnesses in this time.

We will be making a Salem and Zion Advent devotional, with a reflection each day from members of the congregation. If you are interested in more information about how you can participate in writing a reflection or if you are interested in receiving the completed devotional, call our offices or contact Pr. Nicole with any questions!

Enclosed, you will find the worship bulletin, readings, and reflections for our (Pre)Advent Midweek Worship services. Our theme is "Wandering in the Wilderness: Learning to Trust God."

Peace be with you.