

Sermon ✝ December 25, 2022

John 1:1-14

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It is Christmas morning. All of the crowds and hub-bub of yesterday and last evening have subsided. Things are usually quieter on Christmas morning. For me, this is my very favorite part of the whole Christmas season. Christmas morning . . . it is a time for reflection and remembering.

I usually sit quietly on Christmas mornings and recall Christmases past. I think about my mother and father, my grandparents, and assorted other relatives and friends who are no longer alive except for my memory.

Christmas memories, for me, are, for the most part, good memories. A vivid Christmas-time recollection are the many arguments which my father and I would have concerning outdoor decorations. I always thought it would be great to have a zillion lights strung all over the big cedar trees which stood on either side of our front steps.

My father always pushed for a few strategically placed window candles. Well things being what they were . . . and it being Christmas and all . . . and because I was pretty good at whining, Dad would get out our rickety wooden step ladder and string the lights on the trees.

And many a night, I would stand out on the sidewalk and just watch the lights twinkling on the trees. It was magic!

Christmas is a season which is associated with light. It would be difficult to avoid the impact of light as a symbol of this season. Our Jewish friends celebrate Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, a reminder that the lamp of God's Presence does not go out even in times of persecution. Christian's attend candlelight services on the eve of Christmas.

The use of light in the service of worship is not an accident. At the very beginning of the Bible we read: *"And God said, 'Let there be light...'"* And the theme continued: people in Isaiah's time walked in great darkness, yet by faith they found a great light. And then in the Gospel of John, the eternal word is made visible, and in him was life, and that life was the light of men and women. And it is Jesus, himself, who declares boldly, *"I am the light of the world."*

Light keeps streaming through our tradition and scripture. It is unfortunate, however, that one popular understanding of the light we behold at Christmastime is that it is a pleasant, if temporary distraction.

It is kind of like a Christmas cease-fire during a battle. The enemy does not go away, but we are for a time able to turn our eyes away from the enemy and the darkness of war.

I greatly prefer the image found in the carol, "*O Little Town of Bethlehem.*" "*In thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.*" The light we need is more than a brief fireworks display that, for a moment, takes our minds from our troubles and then disappears. The dark streets we travel demand more than a flash of brilliance that dazzles and then leaves us all the more blinded as it quickly burns out.

The radiance of Christmas is a different kind of light. It is not a brief distraction but that which penetrates and changes the darkness into light.

However, for that light to shine on us, we must admit that darkness is a fact. Darkness describes a world where we don't see very well. The grey areas of life live in this darkness. The prejudice, and second-guessing, and hatred of our world find their home in this darkness. And in the dark it is difficult to see ourselves as we are and as we may become. Darkness is conflict . . . darkness is uncertainty.

But be of good cheer, my friends. For long ago in the city of David, a young girl gave birth to the true light. And we are here to receive the glorious good news. The light of Bethlehem proclaims nothing less than the light of the world: Christ is the light of the world. He shines into our dark coal pits of fear and conflict. He illuminates a way of escape. Yet, it is much more . . . Christ reveals the world as it was meant to be.

We who have beheld this light of Christ are able to enjoy every particle of truth, goodness, and beauty this old world provides. If it is true, good and beautiful; it is so only in the light of heaven. We are seeing the redeemed world.

In Christ we see the humanity for which we were intended. The closer we draw to him, the more we are in the light. And the bright light of the Savior is a light that cannot be dimmed by darkness.

So enjoy this day . . . this festival. And bask in the light. Give thanks to God for this gift of light. Praise God with a loud voice.

And give thanks . . . for even in the dark streets shineth the everlasting light.

Merry Christmas!