

*“The Light in the Darkness”*

**Sunday, December 18, 2016**

**Fourth Sunday of Advent**

**#4 in series: *AWAITING THE ALREADY***



**(John 1:1-14, NRSV)**

**The Word Became Flesh**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.

He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.

He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

*Thanks, be to God.*

**[2<sup>ND</sup> Service: Affirmation of Faith]**

**[MESSAGE]**

For many people, Luke's Nativity Story is a favorite because of its pastoral setting and story-teller style.

The poetry of John puts the story on a grander scale.

I must admit that this is one of my favorite parts of the Gospels because of the way it connects the birth of Jesus to the Creation Story and establishes His divine connection.

John's style challenges us to notice the epic nature of God's relationship with humanity.

It also helps us to comprehend how God has planned, from the beginning, to be with us through all things.

For me, this is the ultimate example of "the already" that we are waiting for this Advent.

**Let us pray**...Lord, today you show us Jesus as a Light shining brightly in a dark world. You assure us that this light cannot be overcome by the darkness. Lead us through our own darkness into the Light of Jesus, we pray. **Amen.**

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God."*

I can't imagine a clearer way to describe Jesus.

John intentionally draws a parallel to the origins of Creation, to suggest that what happened in the Incarnation of Christ was the beginning of a new creation and a new covenant through a new divine image in human form: The Word made Flesh.

There is no doubt that “*the Word*” is Jesus.

In Genesis, God speaks, “*Let there be light,*” and light appeared.

In John, the Word brings light once again into the darkness of the world.

John will continue to use this image of light throughout his gospel.

- When Jesus encounters Nicodemus in Chapter 3, it is under the cover of darkness; Jesus tells him that those who live in truth are those who come into the light.
- In the Temple in Chapter 8, Jesus describes himself as the “*light of the world.*” He then

heals a blind man, removing his darkness and opening his eyes to the light.

- Just before he raises Lazarus from the darkness of the tomb, Jesus challenges his disciples to walk in the light of day so they will not stumble in the dark.
- And in Chapter 12, Jesus enters Jerusalem for the last time and calls his followers to **believe** in the **light**, so that their lives might be determined *by* the light.

***“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”***

This is good news for people in Advent who are living in darkness; it is a reminder that sometimes, the light is only visible when one has lived through the darkness of one’s life.

Jim Lovell, the hero commander of Apollo 13, tells the story of when he was a Navy pilot in the 1950’s flying a mission off the coast of Japan.

Faulty instruments had led him off course, away from his aircraft carrier and he missed his rendezvous point by several miles.

Lovell felt hopeless as he circled in the dark over the Sea of Japan.

As he tried to turn on a cockpit light, his instrument lights suddenly shorted out and everything went black.

His chances of survival were growing dim with no navigation assistance at all.

As his eyes began to adjust to the complete darkness, he glanced at the water below him.

Lovell was able to spot a faint trail of phosphorescent algae, which had been churned up by the propellers of his aircraft carrier.

He was able to follow this trail and land safely.

If it had not been for the complete darkness, he would not have seen the radiant trail that had been there all along to lead him to safety. <sup>i</sup>

Suffering can be like the darkness that surrounded Jim Lovell's plane.

Just as it forced him to adjust his perception and see a new way forward, our hardship can give us an unexpected chance to recognize a hope that has been with us all along.

I'm not suggesting that God wants us to suffer, or that God causes our suffering.

I think that we are reminded that God is always present with us to offer us a new life, something better than what we are suffering through.

Sometimes it is the suffering that helps us arrive at that realization.

To be honest, we need to realize that for many people, maybe even you, the "*season of lights*" feels a little dark this year.

We see the lights, hear the music, go to the parties, sing the songs, but we still can't quite feel it.

It's hard to convince someone coping with the loss of a loved one that this is the season to be jolly.

How do you get in the spirit of giving when you've just lost your job or your business is failing?

Watching the news every day makes it hard to think of this as a season for peace on earth and good will toward all.

How does this light John talks about help us get through *any* of that?

Think about all the brightly colored lights that adorn our trees, homes, and businesses this time of year.

They **do** shine bright and pierce the darkness at night, but they also **cast shadows**.

For many people this Advent, the observance of Christmas is hidden by painful shadows.

It doesn't help to offer false hope, forced good cheer, or shallow encouragement disguised as friendly advice.

The best thing we can do is lift-up what John's Gospel makes clear:

What has come into being in Jesus is life,  
and the life is the light of *all* people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the  
darkness does not extinguish it.

Jesus was not born into a world filled with holiday  
cheer, colored lights, or peace on earth.

He entered a world of crowded city streets,  
inhospitable innkeepers, a paranoid, murderous  
king, and hopelessly oppressed people.

As Matthew already reminded us, Jesus entered the  
world as it is, with all its darkness and gloom.

In his life, Jesus experienced the same kinds of  
pain we do.

He learned about loss, betrayal, and  
disappointment.

Jesus became human to fully experience our humanity  
so that we could share this one truth:

***God has come to be here with you.***

Not in spite of our suffering, but to share in our  
suffering.

Not in spite of our darkness, but precisely because of it.

Because, as the gospel suggests, we were sitting in darkness, and now we can see a great light.

**And this is not just any light – it is God's Light.**

Against all the laws of physics, this light does something that no other light can do: *God's Light casts no shadows.*

That's why the darkness cannot overcome it; this light fills every space with hope, love, and forgiveness.

This light shines on an irrational vision of peace.

This light warms every place it touches.

This light tells us that we are not alone.

The One who cried your tears, felt your anger, wrestled with your temptations, and felt the sting of saying goodbye joins us in this light.

The way we have been waiting for is already present in the Light of God – Emmanuel, God with us.

For now, that is enough.

It is enough to affirm that God has come to identify  
with your humanity, feel your pain, and  
accompany the lonely steps along your path.

God is with us in Jesus to be a light that shines  
through our shadows.

God gives us hope that will not fade,  
peace that will not be understood,  
love that will not let you go,  
and joy that will not create shadows.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> deVega, Magrey R. **AWAITING THE ALREADY**, © 2015, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, Page 70-71