

Sermon: John 1:1-5
A Light in the Darkness

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First Presbyterian Church
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John 1:1-5 (NRSV)

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.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! This is the last Sunday before the new year. Sigh, thank goodness! I think that this is a year we can collectively agree, we are glad to be wrapping up. And perhaps even more so than most years, this coming new year holds a whole lot of hope.

In our scripture this morning, John introduces us to Jesus, or more the idea of Jesus. This is the beginning portion of John's prologue to his gospel. It is a poetic masterpiece that paints a picture. And this is one of those passages we can read it over and over again and find new meaning in these dense descriptions.

Jesus is the Word. And the Word—Jesus—was God. And Jesus was in the beginning with God. Life is brought into being through Jesus. And this life that is breathed into being by Jesus is the light of all people. Jesus is the light. Jesus is our light. And there is no darkness that can overcome the Light. There is no darkness that can overcome Jesus.

This is a lot. It's a lot of imagery. And it holds a whole lot of significance. John starts off his writing making sure that we all understand that this testimony he is giving is not about just anybody. It's not about a prophet, it's not about someone blessed by God, *it is about God*.

We read this scripture every Christmas season as a reminder that when we celebrate Christmas, we are celebrating God coming to earth. We are celebrating the Light that shines for us and through us. We celebrate a Light that comes in the darkness and we celebrate a Light that cannot be diminished by the darkness. In fact, the Light is amplified because of the darkness.

We know something about darkness. This year has been heavy and at times suffocating. The darkness of living through a worldwide pandemic hangs over us. And in the midst of a debilitating pandemic, we as a country have addressed social and systematic reform by naming the darkness of injustice. And all of this happened in an election year that was contentious and filled with conflicting narratives. We know something about darkness.

This year has been hard. We have been physically separated from each other and from our loved ones. We have had to make calculated decisions about what is safe to do and what is not safe to do. It is

emotionally and physically draining to have to strategically weigh the risk of each decision we make. I want to hear from you. What is some of the darkness that has been filling your lives?
Give time for response...

It is into this darkness that Jesus is born. It's no coincidence that it is a star that shone brightly to lead the wisemen to Jesus. It is no coincidence that it is an angel that "shone with God's glory" who appeared to the shepherds announcing the birth of the Messiah. Jesus is Light and that which reflects him, reflects his Light.

Traditionally, we have strict cultural rules about decorating for Christmas. While stores seem to push the Christmas season earlier and earlier every year, it is our practice that the Christmas season does not begin until after Thanksgiving. But this year—a dark, heavy year—much of that practice was set aside. Many people put up their Christmas trees and decorations days and weeks before they normally would. And driving around town there are so many Christmas light glowing from houses. We needed the light. We needed the reminder that our Light was coming. Jesus was coming.

While John's gospel was written hundreds of years ago, its a reminder of the coming Light, is still pertinent today. The Light of Christ does not mean that there will be no darkness. The Light of Christ does not mean there aren't shadows that creep in. But it is because the darkness is so prevalent that we can point to the Light. The Light of Christ shines extra bright—it is extra noticeable—when we become well acquainted with the darkness. The contrasting light is a welcomed reprieve. And we can choose to help amplify the Light of Christ.

On Facebook this week I asked people "do you have examples of moments of Light shining in the darkness of this year?" Here are some of the responses I received:

"working on virtual VBS [recordings] with my granddaughter, we had so much fun!"

"weekly zoom calls with a group of old friends"

"my choir singing together on zoom"

"being silly with my granddaughter"

"Having a baby in the middle of all the 2020 darkness has been so, so odd. The most incredible light, but a light that makes the darkness more obvious because of the contrast. So strange, but so beautiful."

"technology to keep in touch with family"

"neighbors and friends and family checking in and supporting each other"

"being able to work from home"

"beating cancer"

"being a teacher for my granddaughter once a week"

"family that is happy and healthy"

"using FaceTime to take grandparents on adventures like cooking or 4-wheeling"

"the coming vaccine"

"the surprising joy of homeschooling"

"communities finding ways to support people financially devastated by COVID"

I wonder, what are some of your moments of Light shining in the darkness?

Give time for response...

As we put this year to rest, may you seek out the Light of Christ to help guide you into the New Year. May the Light, born in a stable in Bethlehem, light your way this Christmas season. And may the Light of

Christ shine through you as you defy the darkness. Remember, “the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it”! Amen.