

Sermon for December 17, 2017
"Bearing Witness to the Light"

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Do you know what the darkest day of the year is? No, it's not April 15th! It's December 21st, the winter solstice. As you know the days are getting shorter. December 21st will be the shortest day of the year. It is the day when the sun shines the least and there are the most hours of darkness.

It is no accident that Christmas comes just a few days after this darkest day. Every ancient society had a festival at about this time of the year. People long ago depended upon the sun for heat and light. They needed the long days of the growing season to provide food and fibers for their clothing. The ancient Greeks and Romans placed lights in their windows at this time of the year to celebrate that the days were getting longer again. It is also usually in December that Judaism has its festival of lights called Hanukkah.

The darkest time of the year was chosen for the celebration of Jesus' birth. It is symbolic and representational of what God did on a spiritual level at Jesus' birth. God sent the Son, the light of the world, into the darkness of human sin and lostness. It is also no accident that, as Luke tells the story, Jesus was born at night, because it is those who dwell in darkness that need a light.

We live in dark times. No, I am not talking about the month of December. I am talking about the age we live in. The world and society are changing and it creates fear and turmoil. There are fears of change, and terrorism, and even nuclear war.

Some give in to the fear. They let that fear get the best of them and they turn to anger. Then in anger they begin looking for easy targets for blame. They scapegoat vulnerable populations. In fear people give in to hatred in the forms of racism, and sexism, and other prejudices. Some merely seek to lose themselves in materialism or self-centeredness.

Even some "Christian" people abandon the self-sacrificial love showed to us in Jesus' life, to embrace hatred. Others are willing to sell their souls for political advances. And the younger generations look at the church and its hypocrisy. Some are turned away by the insincerity of traditional churches. There are more and more people seeking spiritual guidance, but the institutional church is failing to give genuine Godly guidance.

This dark world needs some light. So, in the midst of all this darkness, God shines the light of Christ. For those in the darkness of poverty, he came as a poor homeless boy, born in a stall and laid in a feeding trough. For those persecuted, he came as one despised and rejected, a refugee from a tyrannical government. In the midst of a world where "love" can refer to a mere physical act, God offers real love. A love that doesn't take advantage of or abuse others. A love that gives its very life for the sake of others. In the midst of a world where people feel alone, God offers a friend for life. "What a friend we have in Jesus!" That's not just a pretty song, it's the truth.

In a world that suffers because of sin, but where everyone says "you're O.K.," a world that ignores sin and the pain it causes, God says, "You're not O.K., but I still love you. Come, let me heal your brokenness." In the darkness of our world, God shines the light of Christ. In the middle of the night of human pain, at the darkest moments of human existence, God comes to earth to bring light.

John the Baptist came to bear witness to this light. He was not the light. He made that clear. He was no great Messiah. He even shunned the title "prophet." He was just a witness to the light. God had shown him the light and he was testifying to what he had seen and heard.

When asked who he was, John said, "I am nothing more than a voice crying in the wilderness." Not a Messiah or prophet. Not even a "man of God," but merely "a voice" saying, "Prepare the way of the Lord." He saw the light coming. Like the headlight of an oncoming locomotive. And that light would wash out all darkness and cast aside all that got in its way. And it would bring light to the darkness and eternal life to the spiritually dead.

God had commissioned this ordinary man to prepare the people. So he told them that the one who was coming would bring the fire of the Holy Spirit. He told them that the Messiah was already in their midst. And he warned them to repent and to be baptized.

God called John to bear witness to the light and God is calling you to bear witness to the light of Christ. A witness is one who testifies to what they have seen and believed. If you haven't seen the light you cannot bear witness to it. If you try to bear witness without having seen it, you will be lying and people will see through it. If you haven't seen the light; or, in other words, if you don't know the love of God in your heart, ask God to reveal it to you. If you haven't believed in the light then you can't bear witness either. Sometimes people see God's love but they write it off as a mere human good will or as some illusion. If you saw God's love but just thought it was an illusion, then you can't be a truthful witness. Ask God to help you believe.

I know for a fact that many of you have seen the light. I have heard the testimony of how God is at work in your lives. Share that testimony. Tell others what God has done for you. Don't make things up. Just tell the truth no matter how simple it is. Because the truth will set people free.

We live in a dark world, and the only light that can cut through the darkness is the light of Christ. I have seen the light. And I can tell you that Jesus Christ is here, today, saving sinners and healing lives. Simply repent and give your life to Christ, and you will see that light too. If you have seen the light bear witness to it, not to glorify yourself, but to glorify God.

The light has come into the world. It is in our midst as I speak but many miss it. Help them see, so that the light of God can shine in the darkness of human lives.