

Sermon Advent 3b 2020: Not the Light, but Bearing Witness to the Light

Introduction: A Season of Lights

One of the modern traditions I love in the season of Advent,

In this season of preparing for the coming of Christ at Christmas;

And the looking for Him to come again to restore all things;

Is the stringing of lights on trees and houses and public places.

I love the way the lights brighten the darkness on winter afternoons and winter nights

And how they act as a sign to the world that Christmas is coming.

There are a few tacky decorations I've noticed here and there,

And beauty is in the eye of the beholder

But there are many more beautiful displays that charge the darkness with a new light;

With a light that warms the heart and heightens the anticipation for Christmas.

As some of you know, I've strung my share of lights over our years at the Rectory;

And I like to string new lights every year to add a certain ambiance to our home

As the Allens prepare for Christmas

And witness in our own way to the joy of Christ

That's come into our lives because of Christmas.

My wife, Amy, asked me last week, if I was finished with the outdoor lights,

And I looked at her this year with a slightly mischievous smile and said yes;

Knowing that I was going to participate in lighting the Church Yard last Sunday

And during this past week, so there would be many more lights this year.

Amy knows that for me Christmas lights aren't just a nice decoration;

But a physical witness to the love God revealed at Christmas

And the light that has come into my life and her life and the life of the world

To banish the darkness of sin and death and hopelessness forever;

To remind us that even in our darkness, a light shines.

You see, the Jesus that comes at Christmas is nothing less than the Light of the world
The Light showing us the presence God and the pathway to God;
The Light when we find ourselves in times of darkness and trouble;
The Light in the midst of a Pandemic;
The Light when our hope wears thin and we can't see the good in us or around us;
The Light that draws us closer and closer to the presence of God.

And that one Light continues to shine in our world today so in need of that Light
A Light revealed in something as simple as Christmas lights
And a light revealed in something as profound as your life and my life;
And this season of Advent is a special reminder to all of us
That we are called as witnesses to the Light we know and are coming to know.

Lights as Witness in 1918

I told this story a few years ago about the downtown church that was closed
During the flu epidemic of 1919-1920;
Never thinking it was more than an interesting example
Of a clever priest and church trying to remind people that the Light of Christ
And the witness of a church community casts light into any darkness.

Well, during that pandemic, when no one could come to church
And the technology for broadcasting was a little less sophisticated than in our day;
Meaning it was non-existent;
They decided to bring in two giant spotlights to shine from inside the church
Through their stained glass windows to show the stories in the windows;
And to offer hope in their difficult situation.

There, for all the world to see, were these matchless portrayals of the Light of the world:
Jesus, the child in the manger, with Mary and Joseph and the shepherds;
Jesus, the Good Shepherd, bearing a lamb on His shoulders;
Jesus healing the blind man;
Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane;

Jesus, dying on the cross;

Jesus, triumphant in resurrection glory.

These silent witnesses of light and stained glass spoke a most eloquent message;

And people who passed by the church began to slow down and stop,

Marveling at the hope and the promise of the Light of Christ;

Filled with a new resolve and a deeper trust

That even in this time of sickness and sadness the light of Christ still shown

And would continue to shine in the world.

Kind of like our Church Yard lit up this Advent and Christmas

With Christmas Carols and Hymns playing through our little radio transmitter;

And our broadcast of Sunday and Christmas worship;

That, if it's like Easter, will reach hundreds of people in 14 countries.

John, the Witness to the Light

Of course most witnesses to the light of Christ aren't actually lights,

Like the lights on our houses or that Church's stained glass windows;

Or our lights in the Church Yard or even our livestream worship.

Most witnesses to the Light of Christ are living, breathing human beings like you and me;

People called to bear witness to the light of love we're coming to know in Christ;

People who let the light of God shine in their lives for others.

One of the most famous witnesses to the light of Christ,

Is at the center of the Gospel reading this Sunday and last Sunday;

A witness so powerful and influential that people mistook him as the light itself.

And we see what a powerful person of God John must have been

In the space that he is given in all four of the Gospels;

In the fact that all four Gospel writers speak of John the Baptist

And his witness to the light that was coming.

And we see the power of John in the questions

Put to him by the religious leaders of the day;

Leaders who see the strength and the quality of John's life and teaching;

Who see the crowds of people and the change in their lives;

And they ask John if he is the One they have been waiting for to save them;

They ask John if he is the Messiah.

Now a lesser person, a smaller person might have given into this kind of flattery;

The book of Proverbs states that compliments test a person;

But John doesn't seem to be tempted by their attention

Or by the flattery in any way.

In fact, he's unwavering that he is not the one;

That he is not the Messiah,

That he is not the light himself;

There is another.

There is another who is so far above John that he says he's not worthy

To untie the thong of the sandals of the true light that's coming;

I merely baptize you with water, John says,

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

John knows that his role,

Like the Christmas lights and the stained glass windows and our Church Yard;

Is the role of a witness to the true light that's come into the world.

We Are Witnesses, Too

And you and I are called to be witnesses to the light of Christ, ourselves;

As people Walking in the Way of Love, living in the way of Christ;

And as this church on the mission to know God in Jesus Christ

And to make Christ known to others.

We are not called to be electric lights or stained glass windows
We are not called to be a wild man dressed in camel skins
Crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord'.

No, we have been called, just as we are, just as the persons God created us to be;
Called as witnesses, you and I, in our own day and in our own way;
Witnesses to the light of Christ that has touched our lives;
Witnesses to a love and a hope and a promise that can change the world.

We who have been touched by the love of God
And will continue to be touched by the love of God
Have also been given the responsibility and the opportunity
To bear that light to others by the way we live and by the way we love.

It may be in a kind word to someone who is struggling;
It may be in a donation to lift up those in poverty and satisfy the hungry;
It may be standing up for what is right and true;
It may be in leading a life of grace and love
And in this time of the pandemic, it may be a note
Or a call or a text or an Instagram that share the love and light of Christ with others.

And so, on this third Sunday of Advent, as we prepare our homes
And as we prepare our Christmas celebrations as witness to the Light;
I invite you to prepare your heart to receive
The light of Christ in a different way this Christmas;
And as preparation for sharing that light with others.

I invite you to open your heart to the light and the love of God;
To welcome God into your life to banish any darkness
That may be touching you or loved ones in your life
So that the light of Christ will shine through you at home,

Will shine through you at your work, at your school, among your friends
Will shine through you among those who are less fortunate than we are;
And one day soon, will shine through you here, at St. David's;
So that all the world may know the hope and the promise of God that has come.

Because if we will open our hearts to God,
God, Christ promises to come and make a home there
To banish all darkness from your life and mine;
And fill us with the Light of the world, the Light of Christ;
So that with God's presence we may help light the world this Christmas
And all through the year.
Amen.