

Sunday - November 29, 2009  
Pastor - Bob Dixon  
Sermon - **Son of Light**

Wow, November 29<sup>th</sup> and another year is almost past. We find ourselves beginning the annual ritual of frenzied shopping, hurried baking, travels here and there to buy presents, visiting families, writing cards, overeating, and dragging ornaments out from under the steps.

More importantly however, in our Christian tradition today we mark the beginning of the Advent Season, a time to remember the coming of the Christ child, the true light of the world. In the next few days, if you haven't already, some of you will find yourselves unwrapping tangled masses of wires and electrical bulbs -- searching in vain to find that ever elusive bulb that makes the whole string go out. Some will be busy placing those little plastic candles in window frames, allowing them to glow brightly in the evening darkness to announce the coming of the Christ child. Most will wrap strings of light around your Christmas tree to make the tree come alive with the magic that is Christmas.

Soon lawns everywhere will be adorned with awesome displays of plastic Santas, plastic reindeer, air powered snowmen, and plastic glowing icicles will be hung on every bush and porch railing. Lampposts and shop windows downtown will be illuminated to greet the season.

In the Jewish tradition the festival of lights, Hanukah, will be celebrated in remembrance of the Macabees defeating the Syrian invaders in 165 BC and the reclamation of the temple in Jerusalem. The tradition of lighting the eight branches of the menorah is done to remember the miracle of the relighting of the eternal flame and the lamp oil lasting for eight days in spite of the fact that it was only anticipated sufficient to burn for one.

Interesting enough, the main or ninth branch is referred to as the "Shamash", which is translated as the servant light. This main candle is lit the first night and is used to light the other candles over the following days. The Shamash enjoys the highest, exalted position on the Menorah, but it is brought low and dipped down to light the others.

This week truly begins the festival of lights for both young and old, Jew and Christian. Can anyone even imagine our Christmas season without all these lights? What did folks do back in the old days before the modern miracle of Mr. Edison's light bulb?

Light is truly an amazing thing. Lets take a few moments to discuss some facts about light. First, all people know about the two magnificent lights that God made, as described in the book of Genesis. One created to rule over the day, also known as the sun, and one created to rule over the night, the Moon. In

God's creation he made these two great lights to separate the light from the darkness

The Sun as our closest star and main source of energy drives the ecology and natural forces of the planet Earth. The distance from the Earth to the Sun averages about 93 Million miles. Light travels at 186,282 miles per second. Its light energy takes about 8 minutes and 18 seconds to reach us. Its rays span from the North Pole to the South, the entirety of the Earth.

The sun provides us with predictable, consistent periods of daylight and moonlight. It drives the process of photosynthesis that is the foundation of the food chain that sustains us. It heats our atmosphere and provides us the weather and the seasons. It gives joy to us on sunny summer days and provides a waypoint in the darkness of the night when the harvest moon glows high in the fall night sky.

Light although it seems like a single color, is actually made up of a broad spectrum of different wave lengths of energy. Some of the wave lengths are visible to the naked eye – the colors Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo and Violet. Some wave lengths invisible such as ultra-violet, but felt none the less, as the sun heats our skin. You see the visible composition of light when God provides us a reminder, just like Noah following the great flood, of his covenant in the summer sky following a thunderstorm, through a glorious rainbow. You also see these phenomena as you catch a glimpse of light beams bouncing on a puddle in the driveway or that little multi-colored sparkle in a bubble floating through the air.

Light is truly magnificent and transforming. It is real energy, real power, it really makes stuff happen. Light takes away the scariness of the dark. It helps to show that there really isn't a monster in the closet. As we drive in a howling snow storm it shows us the way on the icy road. With the magnificent creations that are our eyes it allows us to see the beauty of a sunflower through the sensation of sight.

A few moments ago Cathy read a passage from the prophet Isaiah. Most New Testament Biblical scholars attribute this passage to foretelling the future coming of the Messiah. The verses she read are one of four sections in the last part of the book that are referred to as Servant Songs. This passage, along with the other servant songs found in later parts of the book of Isaiah follow a basic theme of the "servant" receiving divine spirit, bringing justice to the oppressed, and bearing the light of God to all the nations.

As part of a prophetic portion of scripture, this section talks about the future. It shows the grandeur of the coming servant, the servant's desire to tend to the lowliest of humanity, the servant's humility and dependence on God, the

servant's commitment to others, the servant's acceptance of personal suffering, the servant's ultimate reliance on God alone for guidance and strength. If you ask a Jewish Biblical Scholar what does this mean they may tell you this passage only foretells of the deliverance of Israel from the Babylonian exile. It only explains the role of Israel in the world following the exile. If you ask a Christian Scholar they will tell you this is the story of Jesus Christ. In fact so similar is the book of Isaiah to both the themes and messages of the entirety of the Old Testament, God's covenant with the people Israel, and the New Testament, a new covenant with all people, fulfilled with the birth, ministry and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Isaiah is often referred to as the Little Bible. Last week in Mississippi this passage spoke to me. Having now been on my 3<sup>rd</sup> trip down there, it was striking how much the Son light is changing things on the Gulf Coast. First of all we were blessed with a beautiful week. The sun shone beautifully on every day. We enjoyed clear skies, cool air, and the white beaches reflecting the beauty of the sun looked even more pristine and inviting. On my first trip three years ago the beaches were still closed, strewn with debris, the trees along the coast still bore witness to the rubble, wind and deluge of the ocean's fury. You couldn't look in any direction and not see something that was still laid to waste from the touch of Katrina.

This time however it was a little different. Oh the damage is still there, but you have to look a little harder. Long gone are the majority of the FEMA trailers. The signs of life resuming are everywhere. The attractions and restaurants along the tourist section are springing back to life. But just a few blocks away, even after four years, like bruised reeds and dimly burning lamps, there are still some families who sit in the darkness of their broken homes, broken lives, and broken promises.

But yet the light still gets through. Each year it gets a little brighter. The shadows are smaller, the great lights of the day and night shine on both the old creation and the new. The light is still there in the groups of caring volunteers who even after four years still come to the Mississippi conference from across the nation. The light is still there in the outpouring of financial donations that still come to build houses and provide hope for the future. The light shows brightly each time a homeowner is given keys to a new home that you helped finance or steps into a newly renovated one with fresh paint, fresh roofing, fresh insulation and fresh hope.

The light is still there in the two Maries, Louise and Gary who come in tirelessly day after day and the members of the Van Cleave and Mt. Pleasant United Methodist Churches who still come in at 5AM and 4PM daily to prepare breakfast and supper for the Camp Hope workers. The light is still there in the persons of Jack and Dee Boering, Camp Hopes' long-term resident volunteer coordinators, the case workers, construction supervisors like Buddy and Steve, the case managers and the workers at the call centers still taking in calls for help.

We saw the light glorified when Dee told us that because of good stewardship within the conference in the relief efforts, UMCOR will be able to continue to provide help for two more years.

We saw the light magnified when we stopped by to see Ms. Dora and big John. This was the family whose house we had worked on two years ago. Imagine the surprise when Ms. Dora showed us the wonderful addition she had added. She remembered our group specifically because we had given her an azalea bush before we left – she reminded us that it still blooms beautifully throughout the year. Ms. Dora's home was a great source of light.

Last week God took 10 different people, each with different gifts and graces and made them into a single ray of light, just like the rainbow. Some had the gift of physical strength. Some had the gift of caring and communication. Some had the gift of patience and perseverance. Some had the gift of craftsmanship and knowledge. Some had the gift of experience and vision. Some had the gift of open ideas and acceptance of different points of view and ways to get things done. Regardless of the differences, we all united together and accepted God's invitation to take on the Servant's heart.

When the ten of us traveled to Mississippi we were afforded the chance to carry the light from St. Matthias in Fredericksburg Virginia, 1000 miles south to Mississippi. Just like light in the physical world our light had a tremendous and powerful source. This congregation and the Holy Spirit served as the source of our light. Your generous support through prayers, fundraising efforts, and anonymous donations of over \$2100 gave us the initial spark to go on behalf of all here to be the light to the world. Last week on your behalf, we were afforded the chance to show God's covenant with all nations and to make a real transformation in two families lives.

As our immediate efforts made a physical change on the houses that we worked on, through hanging siding, sanding drywall, painting, drilling and nailing, we were able to help make the former things come to pass and declare the new things that will come. We had a chance to be the reality of God's presence and a visible sign of his new covenant to all peoples. We had a chance to help open eyes to the reality of what can happen when God works through his creation to restore. We had a chance to bring the victims of the worst natural disaster in our recent history out of the dungeons of their despair and poverty. We had a chance to help illuminate those who see only darkness, by witnessing to the living Christ through the Holy Spirit working through us and his people. We had a chance to see the illumination of God's Holy Spirit on the faces of our homeowners as slowly but surely they see the majesty of things to come and the painful memories of the past become eclipsed by the wonderful glow of the future.

In the next few weeks, as you go about wrapping presents, hanging stockings, and putting up your Christmas lights, remember you too are called to be a light. In the Book of Matthew, Chapter 5, verses 14-16 Jesus tells us through the red letters "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." During this season of Advent, don't let your light be hidden by grumbling about long lines at the check-out, despair over the perfect match between the bow and paper, and being just too busy to take time out for God and your neighbor. You too can be a light to someone in need by stepping into their dark cold existence and showing what it really means, to be in the light of the Son. You alone have the power to become the living light of Christ Jesus. At this time of the season of lights, remember it is a dark and scary world for many around us both near and far. The Son, Jesus Christ, is calling us all through the cross, to find a way to use our light this advent season to glorify the living God. Turn on your light today and let it shine.

Amen.