

This Little Light of Mine

Sterling UMC
December 13, 2009
John 1:1-28

We're getting closer to Christmas. Our boys and girls are excited about the presents they will be receiving. Maybe some of us adults are excited, too.

I don't know if you heard about a mother and daughter who were shopping at the mall. The mother spied an expensive fur coat. "This year," she said, "I think that I will buy my own present instead of making you and dad shop for me." Her daughter nodded in agreement. "And I think this fur coat would be perfect," the mother concluded.

The daughter began to protest. "But mom," she said, "some poor helpless creature has to suffer so that you can have this fur coat."

"Don't worry honey," her mother said. "Your father won't get the bill for a couple of weeks." Well, folks, I hope it doesn't hurt too much. Humor helps us put it all into perspective.

As you may remember I am using some of the songs of the season as the themes of my messages for this advent series. Our song for this third Sunday is more traditional than the first two Sundays. We began on the First Sunday in Advent, you'll remember, with "You better watch out, you better not cry; you better not pout, I'm telling you why, Santa Claus is coming to town." And we talked about Christ's return. Then last week we began our message on Isaiah's promise of comfort with "I'll have a blue, blue, blue, blue Christmas." Today's theme is more traditional. It's the popular children's song, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine . . ."

Christmas is a season of light. Everywhere you look there are lights; in windows, on trees, hanging from houses, lining fences. Lights are everywhere this time of year. Why? Because lights are a symbol of hope. A person lost in a dark cave turns a corner and is relieved to see a ray of sunlight breaking through a crack. A person adrift on a life raft in the middle of the ocean at night is excited when he's able to say, "I see the light of a ship on the horizon."

And that is exactly what we need. All around we see people who walk in darkness:

- . . . the darkness of depression
- . . . the darkness of disease
- . . . the darkness of despair
- . . . the darkness of doubt

Spiritually speaking, people are living in a world of darkness. Some of you may recognize the words to another song, the Simon and Garfunkel song from the 70's entitled The Sound of Silence: "Hello darkness, my old friend, I've come to talk with you again." This is an accurate description of the way many people feel today—they are living in spiritual darkness. We yearn for light to shine into the darkness around us. Advent comes each year reminding us that into our darkness and night radiant beams of holy light have dawned. The prophet Isaiah says it like this, "The people walking in

darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” (Isaiah 9:2)

That’s the good news for this third Sunday in Advent. Just when the world most needed God’s light, a babe was born in Bethlehem of Judea. That is the first thing that we must remember this morning. In the birth of God’s Son, Jesus Christ the redeeming Light of the World has come. “In him was life, and that life was the light of all people.” (John 1:4)

No wonder the star shone so brightly over Bethlehem. Light was coming into our world. No wonder that our Christmas trees and our houses are adorned with hundreds of lights. That’s what Christmas is all about. Light has come into our dark world.

A remarkable event took place a little more than thirty years ago in the Gulf of Mexico. Darrel Dore was working on an oil rig when suddenly it began to wobble. Before too long it tipped to one side and crashed into the water. Darrel found himself trapped inside a room on the rig. As the rig sank deeper and deeper into the sea, the lights went out and the room where Darrel was trapped began filling with water. Thrashing about in the darkness, Darrel made an amazing life-saving discovery a huge air bubble was forming in the corner of the room. He kept his head inside that bubble of air and prayed that someone would find him.

As he prayed, Darrel felt Christ’s presence there with him. For twenty-two hours the presence of Christ comforted Darrel, but deep down Darrel knew that the oxygen supply inside the bubble was slowly giving out. Soon he would be dead.

Then Darrel saw a tiny star of light shimmering in the pitch-black water. Was it real or after twenty-two hours was he beginning to hallucinate? Darrel squinted his eyes. The light seemed to grow brighter. He squinted again. He wasn’t hallucinating. The light was real. It was coming from a helmet of a diver who was coming to rescue him. His long nightmare was over. He was saved.

Maybe today you feel like you are drowning in the circumstances of life. Maybe this morning you feel like you have lost your way, that you are groping about in the darkness, that the darkness of life is about to engulf you, to swallow you up, and that there is no hope.

Well I have good news for you, just when the world most needed God’s light, a babe was born in Bethlehem of Judea. Jesus Christ the Light of the World has penetrated that darkness. A Savior has come. The light that enlightens all humankind has come into the world in the person of the Christ child.

Jesus is the light that shined in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. That’s the second thing we need to see in this Advent season. Try as it might the world cannot extinguish Christ’s light.

Why? Because light is always more powerful than darkness. If you’ve ever been in Luray Caverns, then you know that one of the things that usually happens on your tour is at a certain point the guide turns out all the lights, and it is pitch black. You can’t even see your hand in front of your face. But all he has to do is light one candle or turn on one flashlight, and all that darkness cannot smother that light.

Jesus came into a spiritually dark world. Herod heard a king had been born, and that threatened him. He deceived the Wise Men by saying, “When you find where this Christ child is, come back and tell me so I can go and worship him too.” But being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, the wise men returned to their country by

another route. When Herod realized the magi had outwitted him, he was furious. He gave orders to kill all the babies born in Bethlehem and the surrounding vicinity two years of age and younger.

Herod's slaughter of the infants was widespread. It was a dark hour, but the light of Jesus Christ continued to shine.

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said. "Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child and kill him." Joseph got up and took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, and he stayed there until the death of Herod.

Herod, the king of darkness, died; Jesus, the tiny infant of righteousness continued to live, why, because light is more powerful than darkness.

Friends, the light of Christ it never stops shining. Wars, pestilence, famine, good times and bad, that light continues to shine. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

That light shines in hospital rooms and funeral parlors. It shines amidst poverty and every manner of heartache and hardship. Nothing can stop it. Life nor death nor powers nor principalities, nor anything in all creation, if I might paraphrase Paul, can stop the light of Christ, the light of God's love for humanity from penetrating the darkness. You can try burying it in the ground and it will still break through. As John declares so beautifully in verses 4 and 5 of this chapter, "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." Jesus is the light of the world. That light cannot be extinguished.

But there's one thing more to be said. The greatest privilege in the world is to share that light with someone else. Remember our song, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." Our Scripture lesson speaks about John the Baptist. John was not the light. He came to bear witness to the light. That is our job as well.

Let me tell you a story about a woman named Judith Carrick. She tells of visiting a nursing home in her community. In that nursing home was a woman whose mind was as sharp as anyone's, but because of her illness, she could no longer walk or speak. This poor woman communicated mostly by gestures. She and Carrick had become good friends over the years they had known each other, and, as friends do, Carrick occasionally would run little errands for the woman, small tasks that she could no longer do for herself.

On one occasion the elderly woman waved Carrick into her room with some sense of urgency. There on her bed was a paper napkin with a picture drawn on it. Looking straight at her visitor, the elderly woman pointed to that napkin over and over again. It was obvious that this was something important. Carrick looked closely, and she saw the woman had sketched, as best she could, what appeared to be a flashlight.

"Is that a flashlight?" Carrick asked. Her friend's head nodded up and down, while she pointed first at the picture and then to herself. Carrick laughed.

"You want a flashlight?" The head nodded again.

"Whatever for?" Carrick asked.

The woman could not answer verbally, but in her own way she made it known that this was a matter of great concern and importance to her. So Carrick agreed to bring her a flashlight.

The next time Carrick went to the nursing home she made sure that she had the

flashlight in hand. She walked into the woman's room, shining the light all over the walls. A big smile crossed the woman's face. "Please," Carrick said, "tell me what this is all about. Why do you need a flashlight?"

The old woman moved her wheelchair toward the door and indicated for Carrick to follow. Together they went down the hall to the nurse's station, where one of the aides told Carrick that, a few weeks earlier, during a week of heavy rain and high winds, the power in the nursing home had gone out for a time. The woman had become frightened, and she wanted the assurance that if it happened again, she would have that small beam of light to shine in the darkness and ease her fears.

What a great gift for someone who might otherwise have to sit in the darkness. What a gift to give someone, the gift of light. Do you understand that this is our call as followers of Jesus of Nazareth, to shine his light into the lives of anyone who is sitting in darkness?

John was not the light, but he came to bear witness to the light. That light was Christ, who is the life and the light of the world. And now we have the same privilege that John the Baptist had. "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine . . . Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine." That's our job when we leave this room, to let the light of Christ shine through us as in His name we share:

- . . . His encouragement with the depressed
- . . . His strength with the sick
- . . . His comfort with the grieving
- . . . His hope with the hopeless
- . . . His peace to the troubled
- . . . His grace with the lost

When the noted writer Robert Louis Stevenson was a little boy, he was sitting one night by a window in his room, watching a lamplighter light the streetlights below. When his mother came in and asked him what he was doing, young Robert answered, "I'm watching a man make holes in the darkness." Every time we lift up Jesus Christ, every time we stand tall for Jesus Christ, every time we live in the spirit of Christ or share the truth of Christ with others, we are punching holes in the darkness! Remember that old Chinese proverb: "It's better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." Indeed so. Two thousand years ago, God lighted the candle and sent it into the world. Jesus Christ, the Light of the World was born. And that light is the fulfillment of the promise of hope. It is our part to walk in that light, and live in that light, and share that light with our dark world. This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine!