

First Sunday in Lent – Year A
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- SERMON -

Can you believe it's already Lent? I love the season of Lent. Since we set aside time each year to spiritually prepare for Christmas Day, it only makes sense to set aside time to spiritually prepare for the two most important days of the Christian year – Good Friday, the day Christ Jesus was crucified on the cross, and Easter when we celebrate his resurrection. It's a time to reflect inwardly on ourselves, to reflect on Jesus and who he was/and is, and basically, why church matters at all.

This year at Good Shepherd we have what I think is a great theme to help us do just that. Pastor Becky has gone through this little pamphlet with you, showing you what to expect over the next few weeks, and the different Signs of Life: Light, Water, Food, Shelter and Community. If you notice on the first week (this week) we are focusing on Light.

So, we're going to talk about light this morning, and I'll be throwing out some questions to you for you to ponder on...

We start with light, because light is at the beginning.

In the Book of Genesis, in the very beginning, scripture says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."

"And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness."

This was the FIRST day.

It wasn't until the FOURTH day that he created the sun, moon and stars. Interesting, isn't it? But He knew the importance of bringing light on the earth before creating plant life, the animals and human kind.

What do you think it means that God created light before he created the sun and the stars? My thought? According to the Gospel of John 1:3, Christ created everything and, "without him nothing was made that has been made." Is he that light? Nothing to back that up, just my thought.

Throughout the scriptures, light has come to symbolize hope and peace against all odds.

So, I have a question for you: Where is the light in your life?

In the Gospel of John, Chapter 1, we read that the Word was in the beginning, that that Word was with God and that Word was God. And it says “What came into being through the Word was life, and the life was the **light** for all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness doesn’t extinguish the light.” And then it says, that Word became flesh and dwelt among us – Jesus, the Christ.

I’ve always loved Psalm 119:105 which says, “Your word is a lantern to my feet and a light upon my path”. “Your Word” – the Word that was the light for all people – the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us – Jesus, the Christ. **He** lights my path. **Jesus** lights my way. John makes it clear that even though there is darkness, the Light is always there, and will overcome the darkness.

Jesus doesn’t “bring” the light, he “is” the light. Elsewhere in John Chapter 8, Jesus says, “I AM the light of the world.”

How does Jesus enlighten your life?

When we read scripture, if we pay attention to the use of light and darkness, we understand that light equals hope, clarity, truth, goodness.

In Peter’s second letter to the believers he was talking about the transfiguration of Jesus when he said, “We ourselves heard this voice from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain. In addition, we have a most reliable prophetic word, and you would do well to pay attention to it, just as you would to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

It's interesting that God felt it important to bring both light and darkness to EACH day. For me, the darkness helps me appreciate the light. And sometimes darkness is peaceful and allows me to rest.

Brother Curtis at SSJE said, “Don’t worry when you’re in a place of darkness. God is there, as well. There’s nowhere that God is not and, in fact, we can actually experience profound times of spiritual growth in times of darkness. We are finite creatures. We are creatures of day and night, of light and darkness, who worship a God who is beyond either. … And when we are in darkness, we can ask, ‘Is this an opportunity to move toward God in the darkness in trust?’”

Brother Curtis talks about meeting God in the darkness instead of the light. Where have you met God in the dark? What did you learn there?

Our souls, like the sky, know times of darkness as well as light.

If you’re ever here in the sanctuary at night when all the lights are out, you would notice one lamp burning in the darkness before the tabernacle. Do you see the lamp hanging over there above the side altar? You may ask “What do you mean by the ‘tabernacle’?” The tabernacle is a

locked box which is placed on our side altar in which consecrated bread and wine are "reserved" – being available to bring Holy Communion to the sick. The term "tabernacle" arose for this item as a reference to the Old Testament tabernacle which was the focus of God's presence among the Jewish people, and in many Christian churches today it's the focus of God's presence in the Eucharist.

One lamp - burning in the darkness. The lamp, which we call the eternal flame, is a sign that the Lord is present. The only time it's extinguished is on Good Friday when we remember Christ's death. It is then re-lit at Easter.

Light speaks to our souls in the eternal flame.

The sign of light shines throughout the church year: During Advent we pray for light to scatter the darkness. At Christmas we celebrate the true Light that has entered the world. In Epiphany we are guided by the light of a star. And in the celebration of Easter, after the eternal flame has been extinguished, we kindle a new flame.

We literally share the Light of Christ. ... How do we live out this liturgical moment in our daily lives?

And we don't keep this light to ourselves, do we? In the flames of Pentecost, we are sent out into the world sharing the light of Christ.

How has light inspired you? How has light been a part of your spiritual journey?

Go to your bulletin and find the Collect of the Day – Let's read together SLOWLY –
"Christ our True Light: when the lights of this world blind and bewilder and its darkness brings us no peace, train our eyes to behold your brightness and enfold us in the healing shadow of your wings, that we may love you by night as by day; who with the Father of lights and the Spirit of truth shine upon us, one God, through endless ages. Amen. "

A couple more questions for you:

The Rule of the Brothers of SSJE states, "Christ is already present in the life of everyone as the light of the world." How do you recognize that light in yourself? In others?

This week pay attention to light as you move through your day.

We are called to be the light of the world. What can you illuminate?

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