

The Light Still Shines

Prayer: *Grant us, God, a mind to meditate on you; eyes to behold you; ears to listen for your word; a heart to love you; and a life to proclaim you; through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Today is Christmas morning and we are about to finish the year and the news media are starting to review the gruesome events of the past 12 months.

Maybe now is the perfect time to remember an old Peanuts cartoon. Charlie Brown and Lucy are going through the familiar “psychiatrist-patient” routine. The front of Lucy’s Psychiatrist booth has a hand-scrawled sign reading “Psychiatric help 5 cents.” Charlie then asks his girlfriend about the function of dreams. Through a series of cartoon frames she replies, “The dreams of the night prepare you for the day that follows. ... It’s at night when you’re sleeping that your brain is really working, trying to sort out everything for you, ... trying to make you see yourself as you really are.” Charlie Brown turns away saying, “Even my brain is against me.”

It has been that kind of year. For some it has meant personal tragedies, for others it is family issues, and for still others it has been serious health problems. For all of us it has been a difficult year because of what has been going on in Washington, the Middle East and even on Wall Street.

In the year ahead what will happen on the national and international scene? What will happen to the stock market or interest rates? Who will be our heroes ... and our enemies? What about all of us, what will life bring in these next few months? Will we have good health? What will happen to our children or our grandchildren? What love will we share with others? Where will we find faith and inspiration for the living of our days?

Yes, this is a time for so many uncertainties. In all our future hopes and dreams ... in the midst of all that will come our way ... ***The Light Still Shines from God.***

The Light Still Shines when we know God is listening to our personal needs. ***The Light Still Shines*** when God responds to the needs of our world. ***The Light Still Shines*** then and now ... giving hope!

About once a year I watch the movie *A River Runs Through It*. It is a great book written by Norman Maclean and one of my favorite movies. It is the story of a Presbyterian minister in Montana with two competitive sons ... and their favorite activity of fly fishing.

The story is about the whole world, looking through the events of one community and one family. It is a world where God is intimately involved, but seldom named. It is a story that ponders the depths of God’s love for people who use their talents for good ... and their talents for evil. It is about the two sons trying to find their place in the world. It is about the struggles we have all faced and continue to live through.

Early on the father takes his two young sons down to the river. Every fishing trip was an opportunity to teach the boys about fishing ... and about life. When one of them finds a fossil, the father says: “Boys, this river flows through the land over the rocks to the sea. The rocks are half a billion years old, and show the marks of raindrops, which fell long eons ago. And

underneath the rocks are the words of God. Listen.” And they all lean over and listen to the gurgling river and the father again says, “Underneath are the words of God.”

It is the Word of God that calls the world into being. We live in a world that thinks words are cheap, disposable, and empty of permanent meaning. Politicians carefully plan their phrases for maximum deniability. Advertisers constantly boast of new and improved versions of the same old things. Marriage vows don't last; promises aren't kept; contracts are thrown away and laws are broken by those charged to enforce the law.

On this Christmas Day when we are looking into the New Year, ... where do we find the courage to go ahead? What and who do we trust? Where is our hope and ***The Light that Still Shines?*** The Gospel of John says our hope is in God, who spoke the Word, sent the Word, and now that word dwells among us full of grace and truth. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.”* (1:1-3) This is how the Gospel according to John starts. Echoing chapter 1 of Genesis, John opens with a heavenly prelude to the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Word that not only already existed before God created the world, but was responsible with God for creating the world. There is no earlier starting point from which the author of John could have chosen to begin his Gospel.

In the beginning God said, “Let there be light,” and the world came into being. When God speaks, creation happens, and the light shines. When God talks, the natural world (that includes you and me) is illuminated by grace for a brief, shimmering moment. When God connects ***The Light Still Shines.***

Kathleen Norris describes incarnation, the experience of God in human flesh, this way: “When a place or time seems touched by God, it is an overshadowing, a sudden eclipsing of my priorities and plans. But even in terrible circumstances and calamities, in matters of life, and death, if I sense that I am in the shadow of God, I feel light, so much light that my vision improves dramatically. I know that holiness is near. It reveals that ordinary circumstances of my life are full of mystery. ... This is good news.” (see *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*)

With all the changes that life brings to you and me ... hear again that word that comes in John's Gospel. The word of God comes into our lives ... Jesus the Christ is God's Word, the Word becoming flesh and living among us. John's Gospel says it all: *“What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”* (1:4-5) *“All who receive him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.”* (1:12)

As we trust these words we find ourselves in the company of brothers and sisters even during the hard days and dark nights. This is God's gift ... that is ***The Light Still Shines.***

Jesus Christ is the eternal Word ... ***The Light Still Shines.*** Jesus Christ has come in person to take my hand ... to take your hand ... and lead this congregation as the family of God. Jesus Christ has come not to give up on us, or on all of creation, just because we screw up. The river flows over the rocks, which are half a billion years old and underneath the rocks are the words of God.

Listen closely, look around, and know that there is ***The Light Still Shines!*** *“What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.”* (1:4)

Scriptures: Psalm 98; John 1:1-14