

## Lent 4 John 9 “A Light in a Dark World” March 22 2020

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.



We, who live in a world in which light is as close as the flip of a switch, don't get how marvelous light in the darkness truly is. We only get a glimpse of it when we take a tour of some cave and they turn off the lights, or we are camping in the wilderness and the battery in our flashlight grows weak.

The ancient world was without streetlights, without electricity, without batteries. The darkness had a way of pressing in on one in that context. The fluttering flame of a little, handheld, clay lamp like shaped like a miniature teapot with the spout broken off was often all that stood between a person and total darkness. Those lights took attention, replenishment of their oil, trimming of the wick. They could sit in the palm of your hand and a house might have 10 or 20 of them. As the homeowner would go from room to room at dusk, he/she would often sing a song. If you are using Evening Prayer for your Lenten services, you may sing the song the people sang as they lit these lamps. It was called the Phos Hilarion or “Joyous Light” This little song meant that every night when the people of the house lit their lights they would sing about Jesus, the Light of the World. Maybe we should sing the first few bars every evening or morning as we turn on each light, singing, “Joyous light of glory, of the immortal Father, heavenly, holy, blessed, Jesus Christ.”

The prophet Isaiah speaks to us of a God who says, "I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know; and will guide them in paths that they have not known. I will turn the darkness before them into light, and the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them.

That is the God we need today. Seemingly in a blink of an eye, we, this country, and the world has been turned into something we do not know, that we are not familiar with. Things that we could depend on we no longer can. There is no longer any bread on the shelves, or rolls, or bagels, or tortillas. There is no milk, eggs, meat, or pasta. No water bottles, no paper goods. A meme was circulating picturing Harrison Ford as the professor in Raiders of the Lost Ark, his face aglow in the subterranean cavern, peering lustfully at stone tablet upon which rested a single roll of toilet tissue. This **is** a way we do not know, a path we do not know.

Our 401Ks lost 5 years of gains, our schools closed and so did our restaurants, and movie theaters, and bars, and fitness facilities, sports arenas, and we find ourselves in a rough place, struggling to secure what we had just yesterday taken for granted. And many of us felt we were left in a dark place. A place where a previously unknown disease was ravaging the world and according to every voice in the public square, would soon ravage ours. And although the statistics seemed clinical, they were announced in apocalyptic terms. And if you knew anybody who was one of those statistics, it really hit home.

Then, finally, our church was closed. Well, not really. It is still here. Because the church is us. And Jesus our Lord comes to us still, even though we are gathered only virtually, still we are together. And God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it, He promises Jesus will take us by the hand and keep us; He will open the eyes that are blind, bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and from the prison those who sit in darkness.

And this promise is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate, the Word made Flesh, the Light of the World, the one through whom God called out, "Let there be light and there was light."

In our Gospel reading, the apostle John recounts the time Jesus and the disciples encountered a blind man. He was born that way. And his disciples asked, "Whose sins were the cause of his blindness, his or his parents? And Jesus answered, "Neither, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."

What works were those that God did in him to display His glory? It certainly was not making the man blind. That would not show God's glory. What was the work of Him who sent Jesus. Was it not the purpose of Jesus coming, to take away the sin of the world, to make the guilty righteous in the eyes of God? Was it not to remove the stain of death. Was it not to pay the debt for our sins, to redeem us by His blood, to give us new birth by water and Spirit, to bring us into new life? Therefore, Paul exhorts us by the Spirit saying, "Walk as children of the light. 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'"

And, "Lo and behold" the man became a witness to Jesus and testified before the Pharisees and refuted their accusations and maintained his witness even in the face of being excommunicated, shunned, and cast out of the synagogue. Instead, he worshiped Jesus and Jesus declared him "Not guilty!" You see if you believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord and confess it with your lips, you are saved, you are forgiven. If you do not believe, you are not forgiven; you are condemned.

And back to our situation today. Yes, things have changed. And they have changed in a scary way. But Jesus told his disciples in the face of the storm to fear not. Over 100 times in the Bible we are told not to fear. Jesus himself said, "Have no fear little flock for it's your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32)." We are told that Jesus "will be with us even unto the end of the age (Matthew 28:20)."

We have an inheritance that is imperishable, the Apostle Peter tells us saying, “God has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3-7).”

We are told that we have a certain hope, not a wish for things to get better, but a guarantee of a new life, an end to suffering, and eternal happiness as the Apostle Paul assures us saying, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:37-39).”

So how do we deal with these times? Certainly not by our strength, or wisdom, or power. For man this is impossible! For God all things are possible (Matt 19:26)!

And how and where can we obtain His power? Certainly not by works! Seek Him where He promises to be: in Word and Sacrament. Jesus, the Word, abides in you through the Word. “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17).” He abides in you through the washing of water and the Holy Spirit in Holy Baptism which forgives your sins and adopts you into His family making you children of the Heavenly Father, heirs of His Kingdom (Titus 3:5-7). He covers you in His righteousness through Confession and Absolution where we are promised that he who confesses his sins, God who is faithful and just, will forgive his sins and cleanse him from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). He abides in you through Holy Communion as you eat and drink the bread and wine receiving the very body and blood of Jesus given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sin and the strengthening of your faith.

All these things are given to you for times such as these so that you may abide in the love of your Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ our Lord, the Light of the World. And abiding in His love, we become lights of love to our neighbor, and bearers of peace to a troubled world, to witness to the certain hope that we have in Christ Jesus. Not giving in to panic, not allowing fear to dominate our minds and paralyze our hearts. But living and laughing and serving and enjoying those we love (yes, even if from a necessary distance) through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen!

And may the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting. Amen!