

Worship - January 5, 2014

Contemporary Reading: "Who are you, Jesus?" by John van de Laar

Who are you, Jesus?

It seems that people have always wanted to know;
From the beginning when foreigners travelled great distances
just to see you,
To now when trying to answer this question
can lead to heated debate and even violent conflict.

Who are you, really?

There is no shortage of names for you –
Son of God, Messiah, Lord, Anointed One, Suffering Servant...
But each one feels like a doorway into greater mystery;
an invitation to dive into depths
that are beyond my capacity to fathom.

I want to know you, Jesus
I want to touch something of the truth of who you are
and so even as I allow my mind to wrestle
with ideas about you,
I open my heart that your radiant presence,
may shine in,
may change me,
and may draw me into an eternity
of learning and loving who you are.

Sermon: "Light for a New Year"

Power Outages

The Prophet Isaiah says,
"Arise and shine for your light has come".

These are hopeful words at any time
but I suspect that there are many
in the province of New Brunswick
who have been eagerly waiting to hear such words.
Power crews from here, from PEI, from Maine
have worked around the clock and in treacherous conditions
to restore electricity to thousands of homes.

This morning as the theme of light
fills our worship time,
we can't help but think about those in our province
who have been in the dark.

On such and such a date,
an ice storm hit this part of the country
with a vengeance.
And then winter weather with large snowfalls amounts
have made the restoration efforts more difficult.
It is being reported that
more than 82,000 homes lost power
at some point during the holidays,
many of home were without electricty for over a week.
Areas like St. Stephen, and Sussex, Rothesay were hardest hit.

I met one woman from outside of St. Stephen who had been without power for 8 days.
She described her Christmas dinner to me.
It was cheese and crackers, smoked oysters, and carrot sticks -
a different kind of holiday celebration to be sure.

But that is the least of one's worries, I suppose,
in a situation like this.
People are concerned about the very real possibility of pipes bursting and causing flooding and damage
to their homes.
And, of course, the biggest concern is keeping warm,
as electricity is the main source of heat for many
and the temperatures have been frigid.

When the power does go out,
the contrast between light and darkness cannot be denied.
And you might even realize
how much you take the light for granted.

We were lucky here in Fredericton
as most of us seemed to have power.
And I have been lucky in my lifetime
to never go days without power.
But we all know what that feels like:
when life is going along as it normally does,
perhaps you are watching television
or taking a nice hot bath,
when the power goes out.
Suddenly all is quiet

and all is dark.

As a kid, I grew up in Cape Breton
and, living on an island,
you always had to contend with the wind.
The wind often knocked down power lines.
I can remember one particularly dark Christmas morning
when my sister and I barrelled out of bed at 6 am
to see if Santa had been by,
only to realize we couldn't see anything at all.
Power crews were called
and, within a few hours,
the Christmas tree was bright and shining once again.

It was a common enough occurrence
that we knew the drill.
When the lights would go off,
the kids would go and fill the bathtub
so that there would be water for the toilet.
Mom would go to the cupboard and get the flashlights.
But until Dad got those kerosene lanterns going,
it felt so eery and disquieting.
That little flicker of light, though,
made all the different
when life was otherwise pitch black.

Christmas Star

Life is like that too.
When we are experiencing dark times,
if we find just a little light,
that can change everything.
And there certainly is a lot of darkness
in a 2014 world -
or at the very least,
that's how we like to present things.
But when we stare at the light instead,
we find overwhelming comfort and peace and hope.
But we have to be able and willing
to find the light.

If we go back to our Christmas story,
we notice that there weren't hundreds of people
who showed up in Bethlehem.
In other words,
only the Wise Men followed the Christmas star.
Why do you suppose that is?

Astronomers tell us that this was a spectacular cosmic event;
that the sky would have been lit up at that point in history.
So, I'm sure that there were other people
who looked up and saw the light.
Maybe they even admired it for a moment
but clearly they looked away
and went back to their daily routines.
It certainly didn't change their lives
nor did it guide them anywhere.
And I'm willing to bet
that no matter how big and bright the star was,
there were probably lots of people
who didn't even notice it all
because they were so absorbed in their own lives
that they didn't take the time to look up.

That seems to be the human condition.
We submerge ourselves in darkness
even when there's great, warm, beautiful light to be enjoyed.

And it's no different today.
God's light is all around us
and shows up in our lives
and in the world every day.
But most people don't see it.
And, if they do,
they quickly look away.

2013 in Review

This became very clear to me last Sunday
when I was listening to Cross Country Checkup
on CBC Radio.

Rex Murphy was asking people to phone in
and talk about the stories or events from 2013
that stood out in their minds.

It was one of those "year in review" type topics
that seem to be popular at the end of December.

I would say that 90% of the people who phoned in
focused completely on the negative.

What do you suppose they talked about?

The crack scandal with Toronto's Mayor Rob Ford.

The expense scandal in the Canadian Senate.
Disasters caused by weather like the flooding in Alberta.
The American governments invasion of privacy as uncovered by Edward Snowden.
Caller after caller phoned in
to talk about these same depressing topics
over and over again.

How refreshing it was to hear
a very few callers talk about the light of 2013!
Some phoned in to reminisce
about the wonderful things
that happened last year.

Alice Munroe was uplifted
for winning the Nobel Price for Literature.

Chris Hadfield was celebrated
for commanding the International Space Station
and really bringing Canadians along
for his journey in space.

One caller praised Malala Yousafzai,
the Pakistani teenager
who was shot by the Taliban
for standing up for female education.

Another mentioned the healing that has begun
around the residential schools tragedy
thanks to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

I guarantee you that more good things happened last year than bad.
But what do we hear about? What do we talk about? The darkness.
But inspiring and amazing things happen all the time.
Great things happen every year,
in every life,
regardless of life circumstances,
regardless of illnesses that afflict us,
regardless of wars that break out,
regardless of the deaths of loved ones.
The darkness never overtakes the light.
The light is much stronger
and it should be celebrated.

Hopes for 2014

I guess for me that's what Epiphany is all about.
Epiphany is about recognizing the divine presence in all.

The word itself means "to show forth"...
to show God.
So, Epiphany calls us to identify the light of God
and let it shine through us.
Let's throw aside the cynicism, the apathy,
the entitlement, and the greed -
you know, the power outage
that the world seems to be experiencing.
And let's throw ourselves into the light.
May it guide us and take us to a better place.

That's what the story of the Magi teaches us...
that if we let it,
the light of God will lead us to some place new...
to a better place...
to something great and unexpected...
and it will change our path forever.

So what does 2014 have in store for you?
How will you choose to live it?
Will you let the light of Jesus guide you this year?

I wish for each of you much light and love this year.
May it be our best year yet.

Prayers of the People

One: O God, hear our prayer:
All: and let your light shine.

Holy One, on this day,
we remember how people from afar came to worship Jesus.
Let our prayer be as wide as the world.
O God, hear our prayer:
and let your light shine.

We pray, O God,
that your light may shine on all nations far and near
and that the Church may welcome all.
O God, hear our prayer:

and let your light shine.

We pray, O God, that in our day,
justice may flourish and peace come to all the world.

O God, hear our prayer:

and let your light shine.

We pray, O God, that we your people
may hear the poor when they cry,
have pity on the weak
and open our hands to the needy.

O God, hear our prayer:

and let your light shine.

We pray, O God,
that all who look for a star to guide them
may discover the support and wisdom
that they need.

O God, hear our prayer:

and let your light shine.

We pray, O God,
that in our Christian communities
we may lean, like the Wise Men,
to share the treasures of our goods and hearts.

O God, hear our prayer:

and let your light shine.

God of light,
we rejoice that you continue to come close to us.
May Jesus be the light of life now and for ever,

remembering as we pray the words he taught:

Offertory Prayer

Holy One,
your light has come.
Your light shines brightly
in our humble lives.
We offer now our gifts
as an outpouring of your light within us. Amen.

Sharing the Light & Blessing

We go now, not back into darkness,
but forward into the light.

And let us go forward,

looking for God
in the people we meet,
in the places we go,
in the experiences we have.
And let us go forward,
shining our light into the world. Amen.