

The Light Shines in the Darkness

John 3:16-21; 1 John 1:5-2:3

Pop quiz question. What are the first words God is recorded to say in all of Scripture? Four words actually. “*Let there be light!*” Moses had written, “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...*”, but the stuff of the physical universe, Moses tells us, was “*without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.*” So the universe was made, but it was dark and wet and swirling, something like a flash flood at midnight, wild and scary and dangerous. The only glimmer of hope in that first stage of history was that God was there, “*...the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*” And then God said, “*Let there be light.*”

And something like a calendar began to take shape. “*And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*” And I had a professor in seminary who said, “What’s up with that light?” Because in that first chapter of Genesis, the whole physical universe sorts out in just six days, but the first whole day is devoted to this notion of light and darkness. We actually have light in our universe three whole days before sun and moon and stars get placed in the sky. So again my prof in seminary asked us, “What’s up? Did God have some angel hang a work light, like a plumber in a basement? ‘Here, you hold this so I can see what I’m doing!’ I don’t think so, said Dr. Kline.

You don’t need the whole first day of creation to plug in a work light! This was an entirely different kind of light, argued Kline. A sort of light more on the order of what John saw in the first chapter of his gospel when he looked back at creation and saw a vision of God the Son, “*the Word*”, next to his Father at Creation. And John tells us, “*all things came to be*” through the Word, and then John says about God the Son, “*and in him was life and the life was the light of humanity. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood it.*”

It was that kind of light that took the whole first day of creation to set in motion, not kilowatts or megawatts, but the spiritual, moral brilliance that lives in the heart and mind of the Almighty and provides a blueprint, the framework and the boundaries that would allow the story of time, our story to unfold in a way that is rational, and constructive, good and up-lifting. For there to be a rhythm to life, for there to be rhyme or reason or purpose to the massive swirl the universe had become, there needed to be light and guidance, design and purpose from the heart and mind of God.

And there needed to be contrast, so once God spoke light into being, “*evening*” became “*morning*”, Moses said, and there was a rhythm, “*the first day*”. And from that point on, for the next five days, God began to sort out a universe that would provide space and time, context and orientation, air and water and plants and creatures for food, which all together would become

the realm God organized for us, people made in his image to rule as his vassal kings and queens. So God molded what was “*formless and void*” and “*darkness*” into a universe with light, time and space and rhythm and beauty and set us there to learn and to rule by the moral, spiritual light that lived in his heart.

Of course, we didn’t want that, we chose to follow the Serpent back into the dark and swirl and chaos rather than to bow to God’s design for his creation. But our Fall didn’t defeat God. John teaches in his gospel that the same light that sorted out what was dark and void and deep at the creation continued to shine even after the Fall. Because God’s Son began to execute his Father’s plan to lead us back to the light by which God always intended us to turn this world into a sanctuary garden. So God the Son was going to light our way back to our Father and to our original calling.

And the critical moment of God’s plan was when, as John put it in his gospel, “...*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*” So when Jesus said in John’s gospel, “...*I am the light of the world.*”, and when he said to us in Matthew’s gospel, “*You are the light of the world.*”, he was pointing us back toward the light that has always lived in God’s heart, those boundaries and that framework God gave us to make our lives constructive and rational and up-lifting and pure.

John’s gospel put it this way in our Call to Worship this morning, we read, “...*this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does what is evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.*” So, two opposing plans have been at work here since the day we fell. The first is expressed in the continuing beauty and order that God instilled in the original creation. Every sunset should teach us that God is still there and his light is still to be had.

But the second is the campaign waged by the Serpent, the prince of darkness, to keep us focused on and worshipping what we want, what we need, what we think. And as long as there are 7 billion of us, most of us absorbed in our own private vision of what life should be like, the world will continue to swirl in a way that is wild and scary and dangerous. For us to ever untangle from the Serpent’s influence and our own unreasonable passions, it was necessary for God the Son to become one of us and show us and teach us what light and life and love and purity were all about.

And we are at this table this morning because we somehow have been touched by his light, because his life and his death for us on a cross have spoken to us of love and kindness, truth and purity. But Jesus’ closest friend, the beloved disciple John, warns us in our Scripture Lesson this morning, that this is not a table at which we can have it both ways.

John writes: *“This is the message which we have heard from him and announce to you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie and the truth is not in us. But if we walk in the light, as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us of all sin.”*

First thing to learn: God is actually what his Word teaches. He is light and there is no darkness in him at all. So for us to walk with him is for us to engage with the order and beauty and rationality and purity that lives in his heart and to bring our lives into the framework and boundaries God has set for us. It is for us to learn from God thoughts and ideas, patterns and rhythms, affections and desires that are foreign to everything the world has taught us to think and live and want before now.

But if we will welcome God’s Spirit into our hearts, and walk where Spirit and gospel teach us to go, John promises us, we will *“have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son will cleanse us of all sin.”* The point being that no one becomes like God or close to God all by himself or anything like instantly. We need time for God’s light to sort out our stormy and chaotic hearts and we need each other as a check and balance to be sure that we are in the Spirit and have understood the gospel correctly. But with God’s grace and in each other’s company, this can be done and no adversary and no obstacle should keep us from reaching for it.