

Now I don't know about you, but I think that our gospel text from John this morning is just about the most encouraging text in all of scripture.

I mean, think about it. Jesus appears in the evening. To those who are in the dark. He repeats the phrase "peace be with you" three times to those who are cowering in fear behind shut doors. And he agrees to the demands of a doubting disciple who had just recently declared that he would *not* believe in any account of the resurrection unless he encounters visible evidence.

I mean that's like a gospel written just for me! Just for you.

Instead of being shunned for one's doubts. Instead of being admonished for being afraid. Jesus instead forgives these people of their cowardice and unbelief, and even goes a step further by blessing them with the gift of the Holy Spirit!

My friends, truly the light has come into this world! It has shimmered into our very lives to magnify just who we are as God's own, but more, it has pointed us toward who we need to become as Christ's own so endowed with the fruits of this Spirit.

But... is that what we want? I mean, do we really want that gift, this light?

Honestly, it kind of seems that sometimes it would just be easier to stay in the dark, doesn't it? Where we can live our own lives, in secret, and have nothing asked of us. Where we can be the masters and authors of our own narratives, whatever they may turn out to be. Where we can even read our scripture, say our prayers, but never have to feel compelled to deal with anything or anyone who is a part of God's greater creation.

For you see, in the dark, we can pretend to be whoever we want. We can play the conservative ethicist in the morning, and secretly the hedonistic villain at night. Because, in the dark, who would find out? In the dark, we can bury our skeletons and who would know? In the dark, we can raise and dance with those skeletons, and again who would know? For in the dark, we can go on whatever websites we want. Talk to whoever we want. Cheat with whoever we want. And who would know? We can even spend \$31K on an *office* dining room set, with public resources no less, because again, in the dark, who would be any the wiser? I mean think about it, in the dark, you can even run for President of the United States of America, make a show out of your opponent's spouse and sins, his extramarital lovers and accusers, all the while knowing full well that you yourself skipped out on your pregnant third wife for penthouse suites and threesomes with porn stars. And!!! You could even pay them hush money, because in the dark, who would ever find out? Ahem.

But you see, the light... the light exposes all that stuff. All the stuff that we would rather remain hidden and out of the public sight. Light exposes our sin to ourselves and to others. As well as our doubts, our fears, our insecurities, and our failures. Light puts us in the hot-seat where we have to be honest. Authentic. Committed. And vulnerable. And, to many of us, that is just downright terrifying.

No then, this light, though warm and often brilliant, no, it doesn't always make us comfortable, does it? I mean, I remember as a kid hating to be in too much light, especially fluorescent light, because it would show all of my acne. And, my chickenpox scars. Lordy, my chickenpox scars!

I can also recall a story once told to me by a member in this church, whose husband had just recently had cataracts surgery. And wouldn't you know it! With all of that beautiful light now reaching his retina again, he was made to notice just how old he had become in the mirror. Even worse though was just how old his wife had suddenly appeared; did she always have that many brown sun spots on her face? And when did her forehead become so riddled with wrinkles! It had looked so beautifully blurry and smooth before. Gosh! This darn light!

Yes, all too often light makes visible our scars, our imperfections, our wounds. But that's also kind of the point of the light. Our text from 1 John equates people of the light with those who also acknowledge their imperfections. Their sin. Their humility. While those, on the other hand, who walk in the darkness are also those who deny and try to hide their shortcomings and thus make a liar out of themselves and of God. I mean, Jesus not only showed Thomas his wounds, but the entire world his stripes. He prayed out loud for his fate to pass before him, he cried out loud in anguish from the cross, and in his death, he became the atoning sacrifice for our very lives. And so, you would think that as his followers, his believers, his friends even, we likewise should be willing, out loud, to exhibit our own humility, scars, and sacrifices to the same world. Right?

At the last Theology on Tap, I asked the group what they thought to be the central issues affecting the church today and those potentially challenging her tomorrow. Jeff Podraza rather abruptly chimed in and answered "perception." In that, to the outside world most of the church probably seems terribly, terribly hypocritical. For although we have a gospel that preaches love for thy neighbor and making provisions for the poor, in the limelight there seems to be a plethora of animated "Christians" arguing for the exact opposite. Additionally, there seems to be a recent surplus of piety and moral superiority running amok in here. Also not helpful is that we have evangelical leaders (Tony Perkins) using their office and status to go on National TV to defend the likes of Scott Pruitt and his obscene misuse of office and public funds (19 vehicles and 19 security agents a day, really Scott!?!), saying in his defense, "I don't think there's anything there" (oh, really Tony??). Finally, (and I personally have heard this accusation), it appears to many on the outside like we have a very, very loud majority on the inside who are all too eager to exclaim "Amen!" at the end of a prayer or anthem calling for action, but when it finally comes time to organize and gather, well, excuses overwhelm attendance and only a remnant show up.

Now, now, let me say in defense of the church, and perhaps even some of us here that, I get it. I mean, this life, this calling. It just ain't easy. There's only so much you and I can do. I mean, who can really do *everything* that is being asked of us? Our text in Acts for instance suggests that we should collect *all* of our possessions and then disperse them equally to everyone else. I mean, like, really? Like, are we really supposed to do that? Additionally, Jesus says crazy things like let the dead bury the dead, and, give up your professions and families and follow me. Again, that's just a bit of hyperbole, right? Surely we aren't called to do *that!* It would be too much!

But honestly, haven't we long enough run the risk of doing too little? Truly, if we are to authentically celebrate the light coming into the world, as we have just this Sunday prior, then shouldn't we also act as children of the light? Descendants and ancestors of this light? 1 John calls us to WALK in the light. Not to sit in the light. Or dwell in the light. But to *walk* in the light. Likewise, John's gospel emphasizes this point by never once employing the Greek word for faith (*pistis*) as a noun, but only ever as a verb. To have faith then is to be faith-ing. So to have the light then, I guess is to be light-ing. ...Lighting. We are to be the lighting, lighting sparks in the night. In the dark. In this long dark night that our nation and our world finds itself in.

My friends, the good news is that to be of this light, to be the lighting, you don't need to have all it figured out. No, you don't need to dispel your doubts, deny your fears, or even silence your questions. Nor do you need to pretend that your record is without blemish. No. For as my friend Clayton pointed out in Bible Study on Wednesday, while it's true that we are all sinners, we all have also already been forgiven by Christ -- the atoning sacrifice! So stop spending all your time trying to idly right yourself up here (brain), or privately down in here (heart), and just get out with your hands and your feet and your voices, with others, and do. Radiate the light. Get involved. Support the weak. Get involved. Love and embrace. Get involved. Uphold the truth. Defend what is right. Uphold the truth. And get involved.

For here is truly the best news of all... all it takes is the teensiest shaft of light to overcome complete darkness. That's what Esther Cole rightly told me this Friday. Have you ever been in a closet or a dark room just before the sun comes up, she asked me? All it takes is just the faintest bit and then suddenly can you see. Yourself and your situation.

My friends, all it takes is just a little.

So do more, or do the same, or even just a little, whatever, just do. Show the world that this is not a sham. That we are not hypocrites, supremacists, charlatans, and liars. No, instead show them that what separates this church from what you hear and see perhaps on TV, or what you can pick from any garden variety ethical society, is that we are willing to do anything and everything it takes, even to risk the very way of our lives. All for the sake of him. For the sake of his gospel. For the sake of his light that has surely come into the world and that is primed and ready, blessed and commissioned, to burst out from within us.

Any day now.

Thanks be to God and praise be to Christ.

Amen.