

## *Follow Jesus, Redeemer*

*Isaiah 60: 1-6; Ephesians 3:1-12*

Some of you here know me well enough to not be surprised at one of the great highlights of my holiday season: Star Wars. Not only was there a new Star Wars movie and not only was I able to see it in Kelowna (where for some reason, for the same price as a regular movie in Edmonton, everybody got a lazy-boy; I have no idea why, but you must go to Kelowna to movies; full lazy boy and popcorn). On top of that it was a “Finale.” It was the final telling of this story. And what of course, is wonderful about that (when you have a good director and writer) is that all your old friends come and visit - old metaphors, old ghosts. It was marvellous and wonderful except for one thing.

It is something I knew was going to be problematic for me because of my 2020 New Year's resolution. It's a strange one for a Christian, especially a Christian minister on Epiphany Sunday. I want to use many, many, many, metaphors and images for God this year except that I don't want light to be among them. Odd, I know, because Jesus' main descriptions of himself include light of the world. Problematic, I know, given that for the next two months we're in the season of Epiphany which means light revealed. Difficult, I know, because it's a beautiful metaphor for faith: Light illumines, broadens, warms. All of these are good things.

Barbara Brown Taylor has written a wonderful book that is helping me. It's called *Learning to Walk in the Dark* and she notes one of the great things about light was that it means freedom. As electricity came to the prairies, the people doing the work on the inside of the house, which was for the most part women, had more light and an easier load. Instead of darning socks to the light of a fireplace, they could turn on a light bulb. Instead of getting up in the dark and trying to find their way to the stove, they could turn on a light. Light was emancipation in ways.

However, it is also problematic because when the metaphor of light is used *exclusively* for the good, for the Redeemer, it means there must be an opposite. And that means that anything that is not light must be questionable, ignorant or worse “bad.” Sin and death have been often described - including in our Scriptures - as darkness. One of the most traditional prayers in the Christian tradition is “Deliver us, oh Lord, from the powers of darkness.” This creates problems.

In February we will explore how identifying God with all things light and identifying darkness with evil has been most problematic. It was used to create the ideas of race, something that has

never been proven to exist but has been given so much power in our world. The colour of one's skin on the light to dark spectrum is one of the ways that we can observe injustice flourish in our world. Today, for Epiphany, I want to talk about the images of good, healthy and hope that are lost if we *only* look to light metaphors.

First, as Rev. Karen was saying, lots of us are working towards justice and fighting oppression in all its forms and it is exhausting work. There is a workshop coming up about how we keep from burning out. "Burning out!" Too much light means no real rest! Scientists everyday are finding out new reasons why we must have dark, why we must keep our phones and even our little televisions and things with those little red lights on out of our bedrooms! The little red light on our electronics literally are lights to say: we are powered off. (We use light to indicate that something is not on, it's very confusing.) All that blue and red light tells our brain that the sun's coming up, which tells begins the brain's wake up routine - even if it is 9:00 PM or noon or 1:00 AM. We humans were created for darkness to be a part of our day. In sleep comes healing; both physically to our brain and muscles but also spiritually. Laying down that load of the day - trusting God will hold it.

Light 24 hours a day is literally torture. Do you know the first thing to do if you are a soldier and you need to torture someone? Keep them in an ever-bright room. Torture 101. (yes, I also watched a movie about that this holiday season. It wasn't as joyful, but it was very informative. It is called *The Report*.) It is about how we torture one another though keeping someone always in the light.

And then there is also the fact that if we put everything that is good into the light then we can come to believe that light is that the only place God is found. Does that mean if I ever am in the dark or I'm having what feels like a negative emotion that God isn't a part of that? That is truly frightening. I do see God in the light. I need God in the darkness; and for two reasons. One is because when I'm going through the hard parts of life, I need God.

I must also release the dark from its tie to "negative, hard and challenging." So much of what is in the dark is *not* negative at all but rather is life giving. In the Bible of course there are many, many metaphors of light and dark and often the darkness is time when God is not present - except in the Hebrew Bible.

Gregory of Nyssa wrote this about Moses. Moses' vision began with light: a bush that would never burnout. Afterward, God began to speak to him in a cloud and as Moses journeyed and grew stronger of faith, became a better leader, a better follower of God, God came to him in the darkness. Those of us who wish to draw near to God, says Gregory, should not be surprised when our vision goes cloudy. That is a sign that we are approaching such wonder that we will not be able to comprehend it with our regular senses: so shut those down and be in awe.

The first step to learning to seek the darkness as good and wondrous is to give up running the show. It means that you may find yourself somewhere where you are not connected as Karen so

wonderfully showed us, to things we use to orient ourselves, floor, walls... You may not even feel connected to the Earth and you will not be in control. You will find yourself completely dependant on God to tell you what it is you are to find. You will discover your dependence on God. Discovering that while you are amazing, you aren't in control, is powerful and scary stuff. And it is a truth. You will walk into things and get bruised, just like if you walked about your house at night with your eyes closed; perhaps just the lights off. But that does not mean the dark is hurting you. It means you are finding out a new way to move and be; an ancient way.

Humans have for most of our history been in the darkness. We have not had light and today still the majority of the world does not have access to 24-hour light. If you take a picture of the earth at night from space, the light-bright places are few and they are where we affluent people live. Most of the world at night sees stars, sees breadth and knows God's calming and comforting presence in the dark.

We will not be throwing out all the light metaphors for God this year, though I will personally be trying. Luckily the choir and the hymn book have thousands upon thousands of songs about light and we will celebrate those aspects of God. But I want you also to think about when you feel God's presence.

Why is it that when we were taught to pray as children for some of us the first thing, we were to do was close our eyes and bow our heads? Seek out the God of winter, the God of the dark for that God is healing and steady and sure fast. May this epiphany we be given the insight of the world in light and dark through Christ. Amen.