

It has felt like this year has been so much longer than any other on record and yet when we look back and count how long we've been doing things differently I find myself saying, it hasn't been that long has it? This year, like no other in our experience we are having to do things differently. And we choose how we feel about it. We can feel grumpy, griping about all that we are giving up or we can say, let us try it. There is space for both, but when it gets down to it our attitude shapes each experience. I was reminded as we prepared for Hurricane Laura about trees. There are so many varieties of trees. Some trees that are strong & hard which are great for building. Other trees are willowy & flexible. Some trees produce fruit and others shade. As I took stock of the trees around the parsonage, I was looking at which trees we may need to be mindful of if the wind got too strong. Because we know that some trees can only tolerate so much wind before they snap. I thought about that because I felt like I was just about to snap – we'd already been through so much this year and a hurricane in the middle of a pandemic seemed unfair to say the least. And very quickly my mind pushed me to think of the trees that bend.

This year's Advent will be different from any other and yet it will be the same. We know that no matter where we start or how we prepare we will still end up at the manger come December 24. In a year where we keep looking for the light at the end of the tunnel, we are going to look for the light. One of the most meaningful moments of any year comes after communion on Christmas Eve where we take the light from the Christ Candle, share it, and hear the words from the Gospel of John. So, as we prepare, I thought we would look at that passage 1 verse at a time – focusing on the light.

Before we begin a few notes about the Gospel of John. This Gospel was written later than Matthew, Mark & Luke. And because those Gospels existed, this one is quite different. It is the first Gospel that begins with theology, rather than storytelling. Meaning it begins by explaining the essence of who Jesus before telling us the story of what Jesus did. It was especially important, because those who first heard John's Gospel already had the nuts and bolts of who Jesus was but did not always understand what that meant for them or for the community. In some ways, we have not progressed too far from that place. Many people know who Jesus was but some of us struggle with what Jesus means for us.

John begins with calling all the way back to the beginning of time and scripture with Genesis 1. In the beginning was the Word and the word was with God and the word was God. John is trying to remind us that as much as Jesus was a man for our human experience of him that Jesus was also so much more than we could even begin to wrap our heads around. It is here that my brain goes to one of the new Star Wars movies – but this isn't one of what we call the Skywalker trilogies – no this happened between episodes 3 & 4, where the rebellion receives the secret plans for the Death Star. You may remember the line from the original Star Wars movie, we received the plans at great personal cost. In Rogue One, we learn the sacrifices that were made for others to have life. As the movie was ending and we recognize that no one was going to survive but if they did not sacrifice the world would completely fall into the hands of the evil empire. A brave man, walking out to do his best begins chanting, "I am one with the Force and the Force is with me."

We could easily substitute Jesus for the word Force. And so, in verse 4, John says something remarkably similar, “In him was life, and the life was the light of all people.” Jesus is life & light for all people. In this time when we seem to be bombarded with tough news at every turn, what a gift it is to be people of faith who know that no matter what our circumstances are, Jesus is not only with us but that light is within us as part of our life. I am one with the light and the light is with me.” This light, as we will explore through the season of Advent & Christmas, is not just for you or for me but for all people.

We are now in officially in the Christmas Season, complete with all the heartwarming commercials of families being brought together. You may remember a Coca-Cola commercial some years back that had 1 little girl with a candle, start singing “I’d like to teach the world to sing...” One single candle when shared with another can begin to dispel the darkness that surrounds us. Just like one kind word can begin to change an argument. What would our lives be like, if instead of trying to win, we tried to share the light of Christ that is within each and every one of us.

You may have seen the return of our Memory & Honor outdoor Christmas Trees, long with outdoor lights. In a year when it feels like there is so much that we cannot do what a privilege it is to literally let Christ’s light in our community. It is my hope that in this season, we share stories of light, with each other and our community. It is our call to see Christ within each other, even those we disagree with because God loves us all and gives us all life. What a gift it would be to see the ways in which we are drawn closer to God and each other through this practice of sharing light in our lives. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.