

The Light of Home

New Year, New Outlook: Part 3 “The Light of Home”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – January 23, 2022

3rd Sunday After Epiphany

Readings: Jeremiah 31:7-14; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:1-18

Reflection: Psalm 147

Greeting: In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen his glory, full of grace and truth. (*John 1*)

Prayer: Eternal God, you have given us the greatest of joy through the birth of your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Your light has broken into the darkness and your love has been made known to us. Let us sing your praises and glorify your name. Let your hope guide our hearts in all that we are and all that we do, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 147

Praise the LORD! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting. The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. The LORD lifts up the downtrodden; he casts the wicked to the ground. Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre. He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, makes grass grow on the hills. He gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry. His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner; but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love. Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you. He grants peace within your borders; he fills you with the finest of wheat. He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes. He hurls down hail like crumbs— who can stand before his cold? He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow. He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances. Praise the LORD!
(Psalm 147 NRSV*)

We read the words of Psalm 147 and hear of praising the Lord. That the Lord is there for his people so we should give thanks. That the Lord blesses his people in many ways. How do you

see God's presence in your life? In what ways do you share in God's blessings with others? How can we come together in the light? How can we help others to know God's blessing for them? In what ways do you show your thankfulness to God? How do you share in the joy of God's gifts for you?

Prayer: O Lord, we celebrate the home we have in your gracious love. Let this new year be a time we reflect on your mercy and grace, of your gift of salvation. May we be blessed by the light of your love and presence. We are thankful that we may lift up our prayers to you on this day, knowing that you hear the earnest plea of our hearts. We pray that your light and love bring peace to the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Jeremiah chapter 31 verses 7 through 14.

For thus says the LORD: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel." See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock." For the LORD has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the LORD.

(Jeremiah 31:7-14 NRSV)*

Our next reading for today comes from Ephesians chapter 1 verses 3 through 14.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in

*heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.
(Ephesians 1:3-14 NRSV*)*

Our last reading for today comes from John chapter 1 verses 1 through 18.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. (John 1:1-18 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This message was originally going to be the last message in the Christmas series about home. Then I got sick and it moved. But when I was working with it again, it also fit with the series that we started with the new year. When I started with the text, I had a dozen different direction that I was going to go with for today's message. Because today's message is all about the light of home and the readings we have lend themselves to many things. But I think the thing that drew me in the most this week was the poetry of the Gospel of John. Because there's something in it that reminds us of the way that Jesus defies explanation and categorization. But I wanted to start in Jeremiah, because Jeremiah points us to the direction we're going to go. Jeremiah is very much a doom and gloom prophet. We catch him in a bit of a in between here. That after all the things are going to go wrong if you don't listen, we get some encouragement. That the people will be gathered together, that all the people will come together, and the Lord will shepherd his flock. There will be joy and singing. There will be dancing and celebration. Mourning will be turned into joy and gladness in place of sorrow. And we hear a little bit more of our role in that joy and understanding it in Ephesians. That we are adopted into our home because of the light. Through Christ's will we are the adopted children of God. That in the

richness of his grace we find forgiveness and redemption. That we've been given our inheritance, our home, through Christ's teachings. Through his love. And it all leads up to the opening lines of John. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people."

I could try to explain what all this means in all sorts of theological terms to try to hammer out some sort of concrete creed or theology. But honestly all the creeds fall short of really describing Christ. And it made me think about the light because light is another thing that's hard to explain. No matter how scientific you get, light is an oddity. Light moving so fast that we can measure great distances by how long it takes light to travel. Light allows us to see everything around us. Light gives life to our planet. Light gives us warmth. But what is light? No matter how scientific an explanation I could give about wavelengths and frequencies, it doesn't make it any easier to understand. And so, I think it's appropriate that when we talk about the light shining in the darkness, and that the light can't be extinguished, that even that has an air of mystery about it. Because there is an air of mystery in all of what Christ is. Christ the only begotten son who is the Word. That all things came into being through him and he was with God in the beginning. But the Word was God, so Christ is God. But we think of God the Father, of the Holy Spirit, and Christ the Son as three separate entities but all the same God. Another mystery to ponder. Then we pour mystery upon mystery, because Christ comes into the world and the world didn't know him. John testifies about him. We hear that the Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth. We celebrate Christ's birth while Christ is eternal. Another mystery.

Now, one might say that's a lot of mystery to pack into one Sunday and I would agree with you. That is a lot of mystery. And that's okay. Because I think part of what makes Christ so profound is that he is the eternal Word, that all things came into being through him, but that he came into this world in an earthly body. He comes to walk with us and to speak to us. To die for his friends to show his great love. In death he shows us love and in resurrection he shows us life, shows us the light. And it made me think about this new year with new opportunities, and many uncertainties that face us. A year ago, I don't know if I would have believed that we'd still be down in the trenches of a pandemic. That we would still be struggling to try to figure out what comes next. And it made me think about evangelism. And I started to wonder what the first step really is in trying to introduce someone to Christ. We've been touching on this the last couple of weeks. How do you proclaim the light to others? How do you describe Jesus Christ, our Savior? I started thinking about all the things we could say that would make people believe. But I started to think that there's a better starting point. And I know what some of you may be thinking. How can there be a better starting point for salvation if you don't start with Jesus? And it's this: we don't come to understand the light that we see in this world by reading textbooks. Our first understanding of light is seeing, feeling the light. Feeling the warmth that it gives on a

bright summer's day. Seeing the sunrise after a bleak night. We experienced the goodness before we truly understand it.

And I started thinking about what we could do in this year. And I realized it's doing all the things that Christ taught us to do because that introduces people to him. Because what better way to let someone who is hungry know that there is goodness than feeding them? What better way to help the poor than to show them charity? What better way to help the oppressed than fighting for justice? What better way to show people that truth matters than to speak the truth? And I realized that our greatest act of evangelism in this year would be showing love by giving hope. Because, if there's one thing I have learned it's that when people see the light of life in you, they want to know more. When you give someone hope they want to know how they can get that hope for themselves and keep it. When you show someone love they want to know how they can always experience that love and share that love with others. It is when they want to know that love, when they want to be able to share in that hope, when they want to be able to have that life and have it in abundance, that they've already taken that first step to wanting to know Christ. Wanting to know his grace and his mercy.

And so, in closing both this series about coming home for Christmas and this idea of a new outlook in this new year, I want to encourage you take that light that we find in our home with God and share it. Share it with others by letting others know of God's goodness by showing goodness. Let them know of God's truth by speaking the truth. Let them know of God's love by showing love. Let them know of God's mercy by being merciful. Let them know of Christ's forgiveness by forgiving. Because I tell you this: when people see the light, they can recognize the light for what it is, and they want to know more. They want to know how that light can always be in their lives because they have seen it in the goodness that they have been shown. I share that light with you this day, the light of our Emmanuel, God with us, born on Christmas Day to give us hope everlasting. And it's that light that welcomes us home. And it is that light that we show to others when we do all that Christ has taught us. It's one thing to tell someone that God forgives them, but it makes it real when we show we can forgive. It's one thing to tell people of God's mercy. It's another to show it in the mercy that we have. We can tell people that Christ loves them, but they know it by the way that we love in Christ's name. So, I say let this be a year of great evangelism by letting this be a year of light. By going and doing. By going and being. That we visit the sick. That we feed the hungry. That we care for all those who are down. That we give hope to the hopeless by being the light. So, this year let the light flow like a river of justice. That the waters of truth wash over the world. That we make a point to forgive because we know we are forgiven. We make a point to be merciful because we know Christ has shown mercy to us. And we make a point of loving in all that we are in all that we do because we know that Christ loves us. And in that, more than anything we could ever tell people, we show that Christ is the light of the world by showing how much it has changed us. So that others seek out the light and want it in their lives as well. So be the love and be the

light, and welcome all of God's children home in this new year. Let your new outlook be one that always points to the light and the life, this year and forevermore. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: O Lord, the God who saw fit to walk with us, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions. We know that we fall short, both in what we do and what we fail to do. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead. Help us to proclaim the Good News and to live it. Help us in our weakness and forgive us. May we remember your love and redemption are forever with us, born to call us home. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – New Year, New Outlook

We follow up our Christmas series with a look at the new year and how we can reach out. What does evangelism look like? What should it look like?

January 9th – A Wise Gift – Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-15

January 16th – The Spirit Descends – Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

January 23rd – The Light of Home – Jeremiah 31:7-14; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:1-18

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Jodie Bunch	Gene Laymon	Tom Finley	Family of Jim Nichols
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Sue & Bob Smyser
Family of Bob White	Family of Sonya Bickers	Laura Carlen	Judy McCellan
Adam McMechan			

Rev Camron D St. Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

cdstmichael@outlook.com

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

* Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

+ Scripture quotations are from the Common English Bible, Copyright © 2011 by Common English Bible.