

“Slow and Steady”
John 1:1-18
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Longview Presbyterian Church
January 5th, 2020

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 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. 15(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.” ’) 16From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17The law indeed was given through Moses;

grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known."

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

This December, I was really feeling the weight of how dark it was outside. I remember seeing a friend post on social media a reminder when we were just *two weeks away* from the turning point, winter solstice, that day when it would stop getting darker and start getting lighter. I don't know why that stuck with me, but somewhere in my subconscious-Liz-brain, I started counting down to that day when the light would start returning. I felt excited, and, as silly as it might sound, that anticipation of the lighter days to come helped me get through those 4:15pm sunsets and long nights.

But then that day came, December 22nd, the day *after* winter solstice, and my excitement completely fizzled out. I don't know where I got the idea that I would actually *notice* the few extra minutes of light that would start coming back each day, but I have to admit that my heart sank when nothing seemed to change on December 22nd or the days immediately after, when it still felt just as dark as before, when I wondered if the light coming into the world was really making any difference at all.

The life of faith can feel this way. We spent all Advent waiting and hoping that Christ's coming to us would make a difference that we could see immediately, but I wonder if any of you feel the post-winter solstice disappointment that I felt, wondering if the light coming into the world really mattered at all for that relationship pattern you feel stuck in, for the messy

conversations about homelessness we are having in this community, for the political mess that is our nation right now, for that wound in your heart that seems to be a thorn in your flesh.

This time of year, everything is saturated in new years resolutions and the promises of our culture that dramatic transformations are possible in just 30 days with 3 easy steps and a lot more kale. But the transformation that takes place when God comes to us is something different. It is not steeped in drama or magic. Our reading from the gospel of John this morning, this poetic hymn and opening monologue for John's gospel, speaks of God's coming to us in a completely different way. Our text does not say that the light shines and *eliminates* the darkness. Instead it says that "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." The light moves into the neighborhood of darkness, and though the darkness persists, it will not have the last word. John also recalls those first words of the Genesis creation story by reminding us that in the beginning, the Word, Christ, was present, and through Christ all things came into being. But let's not forget that though God created with just this Word, the created order didn't come to fruition overnight. It took time. God created in slow and steady layers, a new part of creation springing up with each metaphorical day, even taking time to rest as part of that creative activity. And our text this morning does not say that the Word became flesh and snapped his fingers to make everything right again. No - John tells us that the Word became flesh and *lived* among us. The Greek word for "lived among us" there can literally be translated "the Word became flesh and *tented with us.*" No drama. No flash of lightning. But instead, a God who took our form and set up camp next door to us to laugh

and cry and eat and walk and listen and rage against injustice and love among us. It seems that God's work is not as much dramatic and magical as it is slow and steady and faithful.

I see this all the time in the life of Longview Presbyterian Church. Take the FISH foodbank that we participate in for example. I watch as all month long so many of you bring a bag of potatoes here or some canned food there, one donation at a time, in the quiet hours of the church week. I hear of the phone calls some of you take at home for the FISH food bank, simple conversations over many unremarkable minutes and hours to schedule folks who are hungry to come pick up food from local churches like ours. I watch as you arrange lovely donated items that can serve as Christmas gifts, a process that began when so many of you looked around your house for a tender gift to share and brought it with you in a small act of generosity and kindness. Little signs of grace, small moments of truth, bit by bit, the Word is made flesh in the body of Christ at work, slow and steady, God setting up camp in our midst.

And you know what? Each of these slow and steady moments adds up to real transformation. Because on days like December 23rd, this sanctuary was transformed into a grocery store and Christmas shopping extravaganza combined and families poured into this building, greeted by smiles of welcome and the freedom to bring good food home to their hungry families. Somehow, miraculously, the light of Christ's body at work shines in the darkness of hunger and poverty, and at least on that day, the darkness did not overcome it.

My favorite moment of our Christmas Eve service is when we take the one little flame from the Christ candle and start

lighting each candle that folks hold in their hands, one at a time. Slowly, surely, that one little flame shares its light with the person next to them, then with the person next to them, and on and on and on, until that one unremarkable flame has become a sea of light shining in the darkness.

Friends, consider that place in your life or in our world where you desperately long to see transformation. The light may not flood that situation all at once, but I wonder if the light has come to you instead as one little flame. A conversation with your partner where one of you shows some unexpected vulnerability. One single interaction between you and someone on the other side of the political spectrum from you that ends in you seeing each other as children of God. A moment of courage that leads you to make that first appointment with a counselor. Look for those little moments of light, those people who show up for you in simple ways, those tiny moments of hope that tell you that a few more moments of daylight have arrived. There is God, the Word made flesh, living with you, setting up camp in your life, bringing light to your darkness.

And in a time that overwhelms us with promises of quick fixes and overnight transformations, hear this different kind of good news today: God's coming is not always a powerful wind or a magical explosion of life-altering change. God's coming often begins with one little flame of light. It comes to us in layers of new creation. It moves next door to us and shows up in the simplicity of mundane moments. God's light has come, and it is as slow and steady as it is real and transformative. And the darkness has not overcome it. Amen.