

“A Darkness Doomed”
The Reverend Michael L. Delk
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky
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John 1:1-18

You may think it strange, but I get really excited when my car’s odometer reaches 100,000 miles. I keep a close eye on it, as that magic number approaches. I want to see it happen, and when I miss it, distracted by stray thoughts or by actually driving, there’s a tinge of disappointment, because it will be quite some time before the opportunity to witness that change comes again, and for that particular car, it is an event that will never happen again.

In a way, it’s just another number, but it means that my car survived, as did I, and there’s a sense of gratitude for that. It also serves as a reminder of how far I’ve traveled, where that car’s taken me. At the same time, it means the car is one mile closer to wearing out, which puts me one mile closer to costly repairs and eventually buying another one, experiences I dislike. But none of that dampens the thrill of seeing a “1” followed by five zeroes on my dashboard.

Entering a new year is very much the same. The world’s odometer clicks over to a new number. In a way, it’s meaningless, just another day, and there’s a measure of ambivalence – a mixture of hope and uncertainty for the future, a sense of gratitude that we’ve lived to usher in a new year. Yet at the same time, there’s the realization that we now have one less to live.

So we tend to spend a few moments reflecting. We celebrate the blessings we’ve enjoyed and mourn our losses and disappointments. Sometimes, we feel a measure of regret for missed opportunities or mistakes, but we look forward to a future full of possibilities and challenges, which is why so many of us make New Year’s resolutions. Fleeting though these intentions may be, at the very least they reveal that we’ve learned from what went well and what didn’t. It shows that we’ve grown and want to apply our newfound wisdom to live better.

However, at this time of year, we take stock of more than just our personal lives. None of us live in isolation, no matter how hard we might try. We're affected by the world around us, and since we are part of that world, we also bear some small degree of responsibility for both the bad and the good that happens. People will see 2017 from a wide range of perspectives, so no consensus will ever be formed about whether it was good, bad, or indifferent, but it's hard to deny that we've endured a year of particular intensity – perplexing, frustrating, exhausting.

We have heard and seen and felt acute anxiety, anger, controversy, distrust, and a poisonous public discourse that makes many people reluctant to broach topics of the greatest importance, for fear of verbal abuse and judgment. That paralysis threatens our democracy just as much if not more than the attacks upon it launched from beyond our borders. We've endured horrific tragedies, both natural and man-made: the awful hurricanes that afflicted millions; the hundreds slaughtered in Las Vegas, the biggest mass shooting in a year that featured too many.

Of course, many good and noble things happened, too. In the midst of great crisis and danger, acts of heroism were not rare. People risked life and limb to help neighbor and stranger alike. People long repressed into silence summoned the courage to tell their stories and speak truth to power, and we need to remember and honor these and many other examples of how the best of our human nature arose to meet needs and resist evil. But on balance, it seems that people feel we've entered a deeper darkness this year, with dim prospects for the next. That's a contestable claim, I freely admit, but for those who do see the shadows lengthening and melding together into one, we as Christians share a responsibility to testify to the light that has come into the darkness of our world.

John – both the gospel author and the baptizing wild man; two different men with one common purpose – testified to that light, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. They prophesied

his arrival and witnessed his presence at a time when most people did not share their vision of a brighter future. As John wrote, “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.”

How people could not see remains a mystery. Even today, many cannot perceive it, including many Christians striving to be faithful, who somehow lose sight of that great light. Perhaps this stems from an intentional ignorance, or arrogance, or a skepticism that views the truth of Christ as too good to be true. It’s probably a combination of all three.

Whatever the case, no matter what the obstacles, our job, our mission, is to speak of the Word, to encourage people that there is something worth seeing, a power capable of penetrating and dispersing the darkness of our world, a mercy eager to forgive and embrace and adopt as beloved children anyone – absolutely anyone – who seeks the light of liberty, freedom from sin, freedom for grace to come into their lives and transform them into willing channels of God’s grace to change a resistant, rebellious world.

God wants us to bring faith to the fearful by proclaiming the truth about a light darkness cannot overcome, a light that exposes lies and removes the shadowy shelter of forces that seek to deceive and destroy. God calls us to embody hope, much in the same way that the source of all hope, the eternal and creative Word, was embodied in Jesus.

Now this is not an invitation to pretend that problems don’t exist or that they don’t matter. This temptation captures some Christians, so focused on the light that they lose sight of why it came in the first place. If the darkness isn’t real, then the light becomes superfluous, our message irrelevant. To bear the light of Christ for the whole world to see means delving deeper into the darkness, without succumbing to despair. It means going to scary places we’d really

rather not. It means letting go of our pretension of control and submitting to a Spirit that leads us into the unknown.

We're heading into a new year, and we have a choice to make, individually and collectively as a Body. We can face the future with resignation, feeling powerless and full of self-pity, as mere victims and observers of events as they unfold. Or we can move forward with real resolve – a resolve that transcends those personal resolutions to eat less and exercise more or whatever worthy goal needs our attention.

Real resolve for change means residing in Jesus and allowing him to reside in us. It's about becoming a home for the holy and letting the light shine through. It's about surrendering opinions and being captured by truth. And it won't be easy, carving out a place for Jesus to dwell, because something will have to go. That sacrifice might be an idea or a habit or an attitude we're quite fond of. It might be our aversion to conflict or our preference to engage in conflict with aggression and hostility instead of kindness.

Whatever's got to go, though, cannot compare to the hope and peace the light of Christ brings, and it's exciting to supplant one form of uncertainty for another. Not knowing what's going to happen in 2018 can create great fear. Not knowing how God might work through us is an act of faith that's very exciting, infinitely more so than an odometer milestone or a countdown to midnight.

The world doesn't have to be dark. Love guarantees that. Let the light of Christ abide in and shine through you. Amen.