

COME TO THE LIGHT  
4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN LENT  
MARCH 22, 2020

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING IS A PERFECT READING FOR TODAY SINCE IT IS A STORY OF JESUS HEALING A BLIND MAN. EVERYONE WHO HAS BEEN INFECTED WITH THE CORONAVIRUS CERTAINLY **HOPES AND PRAYS FOR HEALING**. ALL OF US PRAY FOR A VACCINE WHICH WOULD MAKE US SAFE FROM CONTRACTING THIS DISEASE. AS OBVIOUS AND APPROPRIATE AS THIS HEALING READING MAY BE, I WOULD LIKE TO DRAW YOUR ATTENTION TO OUR SECOND READING FOR TODAY FROM PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS WHICH I THINK PROVIDES US WITH SOME WONDERFUL AND INSIGHTFUL WAYS TO **VIEW OUR WORLD AND THE CURRENT SITUATION**.

SOMETIMES THERE'S NO WAY TO UNDERSTAND A PASSAGE FROM THE BIBLE UNLESS YOU FIRST PUT YOURSELVES IN THE SHOES — OR THE SANDALS — OF THE PEOPLE WHO WROTE DOWN THOSE WORDS. SURELY THIS IS TRUE FOR TODAY'S READING FROM EPHESIANS: "**LIVE AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT**."

SEEMS STRAIGHTFORWARD ENOUGH. THE AUTHOR'S SETTING UP A CONTRAST BETWEEN LIGHT AND DARKNESS. ANYBODY CAN RELATE TO THAT.

OR CAN WE? ARE WE SO SURE, IN THIS HIGHLY TECHNOLOGICAL AGE, THAT WE HAVE A PROPER APPRECIATION — A **LIVED** UNDERSTANDING — OF WHAT **DARKNESS IS ALL ABOUT**?

APART FROM THE OCCASIONAL NIGHTTIME POWER FAILURE, RARELY DO ANY OF US EXPERIENCE TOTAL DARKNESS. UNLESS WE LIVE IN A REMOTE, OFF-THE-GRID AREA, THERE'S **ALWAYS SOME AMBIENT LIGHT** AROUND. OUR CITIES ARE SUCH MASSIVE ENGINES OF ELECTRICAL GENERATION THAT YOU HAVE TO TRAVEL HUNDREDS OF MILES BEFORE YOU STOP SEEING THAT DISTANT GLOW ON THE HORIZON.

## KEEPING NIGHT'S DARKNESS AT BAY

THAT CERTAINLY WASN'T TRUE FOR **OUR COLONIAL ANCESTORS**. THEIR PRIMARY SOURCES OF LIGHT AFTER THE SUN WENT DOWN WERE **CANDLES OR PRIMITIVE LAMPS** THAT BURNED OIL OR GREASE.

MOST OF THEIR CANDLES WERE MADE FROM **TALLOW — ANIMAL FAT**. THE PROCESS OF RENDERING FAT INTO CANDLES WAS DIRTY, SMELLY AND TIME-CONSUMING. **BEESWAX CANDLES WORKED BETTER**: THEY BURNED MORE CLEANLY AND RELIABLY, BUT ONLY THE RICH COULD AFFORD THEM. WHETHER TALLOW OR BEESWAX, **CANDLES WERE AMONG THE COSTLIEST** ITEMS IN A COLONIAL PANTRY. OUR ANCESTORS USED THEM SPARINGLY. THEY NEVER LIT UP THE WHOLE HOUSE. THEY CARRIED A SINGLE CANDLE FROM ROOM TO ROOM.

**COLONIAL LAMPS WERE SHALLOW LITTLE DISHES**, FILLED WITH OIL OR GREASE IN WHICH A RAG FLOATED TO SERVE AS A WICK. SUCH A DEVICE PRODUCED A LITTLE LIGHT AND A LOT OF CARBON.

THOSE CANDLES AND LAMPS WOULD ALLOW YOU TO **SIT UP FOR AN HOUR OR TWO** BESIDE THE FIRE TO READ A BOOK OR DO SOME EMBROIDERY. APART FROM THAT, THE ONLY OTHER THING TO DO AFTER SUNDOWN WAS GO TO BED.

AS **FOR GOING OUT AND ABOUT IN THE NIGHT, THAT WAS A RARE THING**. YOU TRIED TO AVOID IT IF YOU COULD. PEOPLE WHO HABITUALLY WALKED THE SHADOWY STREETS AT NIGHT COULD NOT BE TRUSTED. THEY WERE **PROBABLY UP TO NO GOOD**.

“TAKE NO PART IN THE UNFRUITFUL WORKS OF DARKNESS,” SAYS EPHESIANS, “BUT INSTEAD, EXPOSE THEM.” THAT VERSE HAD A MORE VIVID MEANING FOR OUR COLONIAL ANCESTORS THAN IT DOES FOR US TODAY. IN A WORLD WITHOUT ELECTRIC LIGHT, IT WASN’T HARD TO IMAGINE WHAT SORT OF STRANGE OR NASTY DEEDS MIGHT GO ON IN THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING DARKNESS.

ALL THAT CHANGED AFTER THE YEAR 1882. IN THAT YEAR, IN LOWER MANHATTAN, THE EDISON ILLUMINATING COMPANY ESTABLISHED THE PEARL STREET STATION, THE FIRST CENTRAL ELECTRICAL POWER PLANT IN THE UNITED STATES. ITS COAL-FIRED STEAM ENGINES TURNED THE DYNAMOS THAT GENERATED ELECTRICAL CURRENT — DC BACK IN THOSE EARLY DAYS, BEFORE THE AC STANDARD HAD BEEN SET. INITIALLY, PEARL STREET STATION POWERED JUST 400 LAMPS IN 85 HOUSEHOLDS.

NEW YORK CITY, AT THE TIME — ITS STREETS AS WELL AS ITS HOMES — WAS LIT AT NIGHT BY GAS LAMPS. IT SOON BECAME APPARENT THAT THIS WAS THE TECHNOLOGY OF THE PAST. ONCE A POWER PLANT HAD BEEN BUILT AND INSULATED COPPER WIRES RUN THROUGHOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD, A VIRTUALLY UNLIMITED SUPPLY OF ELECTRICITY COULD BE PROVIDED CHEAPLY AND RELATIVELY CLEANLY. THE NEW ELECTRIC LIGHTS BURNED MORE BRIGHTLY THAN THE SPUTTERING GASLIGHTS OF GENERATIONS PAST.

OVER THE NEXT DECADES, ELECTRIFICATION — WHAT WE NOW KNOW AS THE POWER GRID — WAS ONE OF THE GREAT TECHNOLOGICAL PROJECTS OF THE AGE. STARTING IN THE URBAN CENTERS, COMMERCIAL ELECTRICAL POWER SPREAD TO SMALLER AND SMALLER COMMUNITIES. BY 1930, 70 PERCENT OF THE HOUSEHOLDS IN THE COUNTRY HAD BEEN ELECTRIFIED. IT TOOK GREATER EFFORT — AND SOME GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION DURING THE NEW DEAL — TO BRING ELECTRIC POWER TO FARMS AND RURAL

COMMUNITIES. BY THE TIME OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR, THE GREATER PART OF THIS WORK HAD BEEN COMPLETED. IN THE SPACE OF A GENERATION OR TWO, THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS HAD BEEN CHANGED FOREVER.

TO US TODAY — BARRING A HURRICANE OR OTHER NATURAL DISASTER THAT TAKES DOWN THE POWER GRID — **THE SETTING OF THE SUN IS NO OBSTACLE TO ANYTHING WE WANT TO DO.** IS IT TOO DARK TO READ? REACH OVER AND TURN ON THE LAMP. IT'S THAT EASY. EVEN ACTIVITIES LIKE HIGH-SCHOOL SPORTS ARE NO LONGER RESTRICTED TO DAYLIGHT HOURS. ATHLETIC FIELDS ARE ILLUMINATED BY BANKS OF POWERFUL LIGHTS THAT CAN TURN NIGHT INTO NEAR-DAY AT THE FLICK OF A SWITCH.

**NOW WE ARE FACING A DIFFERENT KIND OF DARKNESS.** A DARKNESS OF ISOLATIONISM. WE MAY VENTURE OUTSIDE THE SAFETY OF OUR HOME FOR ESSENTIAL ITEMS, BUT WE PRACTICE **"SOCIAL DISTANCING"**. THAT IS A TERM THAT PROBABLY NONE OF US HAD EVER USED UNTIL A FEW WEEKS AGO.

MOST OF US ARE NOT ISOLATIONISTS. WE ARE SOCIAL BEINGS. WE **THRIVE ON HUMAN INTERACTION** AND HUMAN TOUCH. THE **"CHILDREN OF THE LIGHT"** THAT PAUL WRITES ABOUT REFERS TO BEING IN A COMMUNITY, IN A CHURCH, IN RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS.

ITS BRINGS TO MY MIND THE OLD JINGLE FROM THE PHONE COMPANY OF MY CHILDHOOD: "REACH OUT, REACH OUT, TOUCH SOMEONE."

AS THE INVENTION OF ELECTRICAL GENERATORS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OUR ELECTRICAL GRID CAST OUT PHYSICAL DARKNESS, SO **TOO CAN OUR TECHNOLOGY PROVIDE MEANS TO MOVE FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT.**

WE CAN MAINTAIN A SENSE OF COMMUNITY BY REACHING OUT VIA OUR PHONES OR SOCIAL MEDIA. AS OUR WORSHIP TODAY STREAMS OVER THE INTERNET WE ARE USING **A TECHNOLOGY THAT OUR GRANDPARENTS NEVER COULD HAVE IMAGINED.**

MOST OF US HAVE ALWAYS HAD THE BELIEVE THAT OUR TECHNOLOGY OR **SCIENCE WILL SAVE US** FROM ANY ILLS OR SINS THAT WE MAY HAVE CREATED.

THIS IS BELIEVE HAS PROBABLY NEVER BEEN GREATER THAN NOW AS WE **ANTICIPATE A CURE OR VACCINE** AGAINST THE CORONAVIRUS.

AS “CHILDREN OF THE LIGHT”, AS BEING CONFINED TO THE SAFETY OF OUR HOMES, IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WE FOCUS ON WAYS TO CONTINUE TO BE A COMMUNITY. WE NEED TO REACH OUT AND TOUCH OTHERS, **NOT IN A PHYSICAL SENSE, BUT IN A SPIRITUAL SENSE.**

### **THE SON AND THE SUN**

HOW WOULD ANYONE HAVE LITERALLY MOVED FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT IN BIBLICAL TIMES? IT **WASN'T A MATTER OF THROWING AN ELECTRICAL SWITCH.** MAYBE IF YOU WALKED FROM A DARK STREET INTO A HOUSE LIT BY OIL LAMPS, YOU'D HAVE SOMETHING OF THAT EXPERIENCE. BUT STILL, THOSE LAMPS DIDN'T EXACTLY LIGHT UP A ROOM. AND IF YOU VENTURED OUT INTO THE STREET WITH AN OIL LAMP IN HAND, **ITS FEEBLE FLAME WOULDN'T DO MUCH TO PUSH BACK THE DARKNESS.**

TO PEOPLE OF BIBLICAL TIMES — INCLUDING THOSE STRUGGLING CHRISTIANS OF EPHESUS — **THE ONLY TRULY RELIABLE SOURCES OF LIGHT WERE THE HEAVENLY BODIES OF SUN**, MOON AND STARS. GRANDEST OF ALL, OF COURSE — AND THE ONLY ONE THAT COULD VANQUISH THE NIGHT — **WAS THE SUN**. THE PROPHET MALACHI BEARS WITNESS TO THIS TRUTH, AS HE REFERS TO THE COMING MESSIAH AS “**THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**” (THAT’S S-U-N). WE CHRISTIANS, OF COURSE, IDENTIFY THE MESSIAH AS GOD’S SON, JESUS (THAT’S S-O-N). IT’S ONLY CHRIST’S LIGHT THAT SAVES US.

**OUR INDIVIDUAL LIGHTS ARE NO MATCH FOR HIS**. STILL, THE AUTHOR OF THIS ANCIENT LETTER IS ENCOURAGING US TO RAISE OUR FEEBLE LAMPS HIGH, ALL THE SAME: TO **CHALLENGE THE DARKNESS**. BUT THEN WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING ELSE. WE NEED TO WAIT. WE AWAIT THE COMING OF THE ONE FORCE IN THE UNIVERSE POWERFUL ENOUGH TO **VANQUISH DARKNESS**. THAT, OF COURSE, IS THE DAWN: THE SUN (S-U-N) OF RIGHTEOUSNESS HIMSELF.

**WE ARE IN THE DARK SEASON OF LENT**. WE ARE LIVING IN THE DARKNESS OF ISOLATIONISM. WE ARE LIVING IN THE BLACKNESS OF “GOOD FRIDAY”.

BUT EASTER IS COMING. EASTER IS COMING WHEN WE CELEBRATE THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS!

WHENEVER THE TIME COMES WHEN WE WILL BE SET FREE FROM OUR CURRENT SITUATION WE ARE GOING TO CELEBRATE EASTER.

THAT WILL CERTAINLY NOT BE THE CALENDAR DATE OF EASTER, APRIL 12, BUT IT WILL HAPPEN AND THEN WE WILL CELEBRATE IT!

SO IN THE DARKNESS OF THE SEASON OF LENT, WE WAIT.

SEE, THE **SOFT STREAKS OF LIGHT ARE STARTING TO APPEAR** IN THE

EASTERN SKY. *COME TO THE LIGHT*. LET YOUR SMALL LIGHT BECOME LOST IN THE GREATER LIGHT OF GOD'S GLORY. *COME TO THE LIGHT*, AND BE SAVED!

AS CHARLES WESLEY PUT IT IN HIS HYMN "CHRIST, WHOSE GLORY FILLS THE SKIES," WRITTEN IN 1740, LONG BEFORE ELECTRIC LIGHT:

*VISIT THEN THIS SOUL OF MINE;*

*PIERCE THE GLOOM OF SIN AND GRIEF.*

*FILL ME, RADIANCY DIVINE;*

*SCATTER ALL MY UNBELIEF;*

*MORE AND MORE THYSELF DISPLAY,*

*SHINING TO THE PERFECT DAY.*

THESE DAYS OF LENT ARE AN EXCELLENT TIME **TO EXAMINE OUR LIVES, TO DISCERN THE WAYS IN WHICH** WE STILL PREFER THE DARKNESS OF SIN OVER THE LIGHT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. MAY WE ALL HAVE THE COURAGE, AND THE FAITH, TO **TURN TO THE LIGHT OF JESUS CHRIST**, AND FIND NEW LIFE IN HIM! SO BE READY. WE WILL CELEBRATE EASTER THIS YEAR LIKE WE HAVE NEVER CELEBRATED BEFORE!

BE SAFE, BE READY, BE PREPARED. BUT **DO SOMETHING NOW TO HELP CAST** OUT THE DARKNESS THAT SHROUDS ALL OF US. REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMEONE, NOT PHYSICALLY BUT EMOTIONALLY. BE THE CALMING VOICE THAT PROVIDES A SENSE OF COMMUNITY. BE THERE FOR EACH OTHER. LET YOUR LIGHT SO SHINE!