

I Advent / December 3, 2017

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Isaiah 64:1-9           We are the clay, you are our potter.

1 Corinthians 1:3-9    You are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait

Mark 13:24-37        Keep awake

Yesterday Ruth and I decided that we wanted to have lawn decoration for the Christmas season, and so we went to Home Depot and Lowe's in Gilroy to see what they had. Walking into those stores was instant sensory overload: Ruth lasted about 15 minutes and then said, 'Can we go home now?' Both stores had aisle after aisle of blinking Christmas tree lights, silver metallic Christmas trees, red satin bells, and lots of statues of Santa, snowmen, elves, and reindeer. The stores were sparkling and musical and happy; but they only had one blow-up crèche scene with a cartoon-ish underinflated version of the baby Jesus in it. The experience got me thinking about the lights of Christmas versus the light of Christ at Christmas.

The prologue in John's Gospel tells us about the light of Christ: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning... In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it... The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world."

This image of Christ bringing the light of God's essence into the world shapes the image that we enact at the Easter Vigil each year. We begin that service with a darkened church; a new fire is lighted outside at the front steps; that fire is used to light a taper that lights a Christ Candle that is carried into the church. As the candle is brought toward the altar, other candles are lighted, lights are turned on, and we chant: "The Light of Christ; Thanks be to God." At Christmas, the light of Christ, that essence of God brought to earth, came to us as a human baby. Our focus during Advent season is to think about and pray about how much this world needs God's light, and how much each of us needs this divine light in our own life.

I have often thought that our generation needs the light of Christ more than any generation before us. Let me share with you a newspaper editorial:

"The world is too big for us. Too much is going on; too many crimes, too much violence and excitement. Try as you will, you get behind in the race, in spite of yourself. It is an incessant strain to keep pace... and still, you lose ground. Science empties its discoveries on you so fast that you stagger beneath them in hopeless bewilderment. The political world is news seen so rapidly you are out of breath trying to keep pace with who's in and who's

out. Everything is high pressure. Human nature cannot endure much more!” This article was written in *The Atlantic Journal*, on June 16, 1833. Okay, maybe we are not all that unique in human history.

In today’s OT reading the prophet Isaiah begs for God to intervene, to show Himself, to take control. (Isaiah 64:1 says,) “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence.” Isaiah was grieving over what was left of Jerusalem when Israel returned from their exile in Babylon. The city was in ruins, and the Temple had been leveled to the ground. Isaiah and the people carried a deep sense of separation from God; living in darkness. This passage is Isaiah’s plea for God to return the light of His presence to His people. (A good plea for us.)

In Mark’s Gospel Jesus told his disciples that it was important to notice what was going on around them. They needed to notice the signs that God’s kingdom IS on its way; they needed to be aware; be ready; stay alert; to pay attention to the light that Christ was bringing to them, and to the whole world. Our paying attention to the light of Christ will change how we live; and that will change who we are; and that change in us has the power to change the world. Our Scriptures promise that to be true.

Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth, “You are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait.” Followers of Christ have all the spiritual connections we need. We know what we need to know. We need to live expectantly, paying attention to the signs around us, showing the light of Christ to the world.

So, getting back to Ruth’s and my shopping trip, and to all the Christmas lights that screamed out to us the secular side of Christmas; I have decided that for this Christmas, every time I see any Christmas lights, whether they are lighting a manger scene, or blinking on a reindeer’s nose, or outlining the windows and eaves of a home, I am going to say to myself: “The light of Christ – Thanks be to God”.

Will you join me in keeping alive in us the real message of Christmas? Will you use this little chant from the Easter Vigil, with the words that remind us WHY we have an Advent season? Will you join me, using the lights that our neighborhoods will be putting on display, to remind us that the source of God’s light has come before, and will come again?

The challenge of Advent season is to live expectantly; to be alert; and to be ready. May every incandescent light, and florescent light, and LED light, and laser light remind us that Christ is the true light of the world.

“The light of Christ: Thanks be to God.” Amen.