

Christmas1C_122715_mcr
All Saints Episcopal Church

In the name of God, who became flesh and dwelt among us. Amen.

When I was little, I was afraid of the dark. There was a night-light in my room to make it less dark in case I woke up. When I was a teenager I had the room in the semi-finished attic of our house, the only room upstairs, and I was afraid then, too. At night, I imagined all sorts of creatures coming out from under the eaves of the roof and making their way through my closet and into the room with me. I knew in my head that it wasn't possible, but because there was no light up there, I could not be sure.

We've just passed the winter solstice, the day in the year with the most darkness in the northern hemisphere. I'm not afraid of the dark anymore. In fact, I like to be at home, in the early darkness of a winter afternoon, with the lights creating a warmth and coziness against the cold (mostly imagined and hoped for, at this point!) of the world outside.

For some people, however, all that darkness is frightening. A lot of folks get depressed during the dark time of year; they physically need light to be well.

In the darkness of our world, there are many other fears as well. My fears may seem totally unfounded or insignificant to you, and vice versa, but when we are in the midst of them, they are very real and overwhelming. We fear the unknown... illness or loss of health...losing a job...losing all that we have worked for. We fear for our children and their future. Nowadays, we seem to fear the stranger more than ever before. Others fear for their lives...fear a life of hunger and disease...of homelessness...of being marginalized.

But today the Gospel of John tells us something special about the dark and the light:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning. Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being. What came into being through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light. ... The true

light that shines on all people was coming into the world. The light was in the world, and the world came into being through the light, but the world didn't recognize the light. The light came to his own people, and his own people didn't welcome him. But those who did welcome him, those who believed in his name, he authorized to become God's children,... and the Word became flesh and made his home among us.

Words of poetry and power to be sure. Words we recognize because they are always the same words to be read on Christmas Day and the first Sunday after Christmas. They are not the words of Christmas pageants and children in bathrobes and tinsel. They are words of strength...and light...a light that overcomes darkness, that shows us that we do not have to be afraid.

Jesus...the Word...Logos...Wisdom...with God...was God...Son of God...Emmanuel... God with us. Jesus bringing light to the world...casting away the works of darkness... light from light eternal.

And beyond these lofty words and phrases, the Word that became flesh spoke words which took on flesh as well. Jesus not only spoke about a God of mercy and forgiveness, he offered that forgiveness to a frightened, shamed woman standing alone with a pile of stones left around her, and offered it to his friend Peter at a second charcoal fire. Jesus not only spoke about God's reign of justice, he stood in solidarity with the poor and the outcasts.

He not only spoke about a God who longs for our wholeness, but his touch brought clean skin to a leper, a stooped woman to straightness. He not only said, "I love you," to the hungry crowd, but fed their hungers with bread and with truth. He didn't just say, "I love you," to each of us, but loved us so much that he was willing to die for us.

Jesus came to be one of us, to live with us, to live like us, and to teach us how to live like him, right here, right now. Now we are the ones who are enfleshed. It is our turn to bring flesh to Jesus' words, to bring light to the world, to cast out fear, to offer forgiveness, to stand in solidarity with the poor and outcast, to bring wholeness and healing, to feed the hungry, to say, "I love you" to our neighbor. Right here, right now. We promise to do those things every time we baptize someone and renew our own baptismal vows; as a community of faith we are called to give flesh to those vows. Right here, right now.

There has been a poem going around on Facebook in the last week or so. I still remember it on a Christmas card I got several years ago. It bears repeating, particularly in these dark times, as a profound statement about what it means to be the body of Christ. It is by Howard Thurman (1899-1981) and it's called 'The Work of Christmas:'

*When the star in the sky is gone,
When the Kings and Princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins -
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To teach the nations,
To bring Christ to all,
To make music in the heart.*

May God fill your heart with love this Christmas, and may that love set you free to give God's gifts of light and hope and peace to those around you. AMEN.