

Lent IV Year A

“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world”

A question I want you to think about...Why do we come here? Why do we as relatively intelligent and enlightened people give our money and time and talent to this enterprise we call the church. Why does it matter? Really... why does it matter? I've heard it said before that coming to church is “private time with God”... a place of solace... a place in which to escape from the world’s cares perhaps... an oasis from the storm, as it were... And the church has been complicit in such a characterization... the church, a safe place far from the maddening crowd.... A place of respite... of comfort.

Your vestry has just met in retreat to take account of who we are, where we are... and where we are going. It is an exciting time for us here at All Saints... a renewed sense of energy... We feel that we are perhaps a best kept secret, that we are on the cusp of renewal, that we have much to offer to the many who are looking to believe the grand vision of the Gospels with integrity, not having to check ones’ mind at the door (a slogan now immortalized on our coffee mugs!).... I have been thinking a lot lately about the role of the church. So if I may I would like to reflect on what it is I think we are about here... who we are as a people of faith, and how that matters... how we matter.... It is clear to me that the church... and I mean the church as a whole in its vast and increasing diversity (across denominations, even across religions)... It is clear to me that the church is in the midst of a remaking... questioning seriously the proverbial, “the way we’ve always done it.” That’s happening with theology, with liturgy, the way we do ministry... every aspect of the church is up for question... and the way we live our lives in our era... the era of what philosophers now call post post modernity, whatever that means... and that is as it should be... because if we don’t have a good and compelling reason to be here... why we act the way we act, then we are wasting valuable time... because life is so terribly short... and we best be about living it authentically and with purpose.

The church is a principal theme in John’s Gospel.... The light of the world of which the writer speaks in the prologue of this gospel and in our reading today is none other than the light of humankind. If we are to ever own that... then watch out world!.... The agency of humankind, if you will, humankind’s imaginative and enlightened ability to change the world around us... agency... In that regard the church is an outpost for ministry, a staging ground for the world’s creation... creation still in the becoming...the church, that great human mystery: an agent for transformation, creative change, and

again, by church I mean a community of people of conscience who own with courage their identity as light bearers who make the choice over and again to live for the good of the whole... And it is a people who gather as community to celebrate in gratitude that identity... that celebrate our being chosen as the ones who will bring the shared abundance of God's love to the world... something to celebrate indeed.

There is no other way that love is made alive in our world except through you and me and all who would live the life of giving and sacrifice and rigorous commitment to the greater good, all of our so-called imperfections notwithstanding. Without the people of faith from generation to generation, Jesus the archetype; without the people of faith, God is nothing more than a disembodied fantasy. The reason we have beautiful music, and why preaching and teaching matter; and why we work at liturgy; and why we gather as community, is to experience the profound mystery of what it means to be connected to each other and our world... God inhabits our connections to each other... and that is to be in God... We need not look any longer "out there" for God.... God inhabits our lives as light, and our call is to give that light away; and that is worthy of unadulterated praise.... So we gather here and claim our true identity with gratitude.... And where there is gratitude, brothers and sisters, there is no fear.

"Church is my private time with God"....Friends, there is nothing private about God.... There are those who say, "I can experience God out in nature,' at the beach, or in the woods, or in meditation... all those things are good... but God is a God who thrives in human community... God amid the spit and mud of life.... According to the Genesis myth Humankind begins in a solitary garden, but ends up, in the fullness of time in a city, in human commerce, amid the fecund complexity of human experience born of the connections we have in community... God lives in the connections we make, face to face... life to life... The church is an outward and visible sign of our profound connection to each other.... God is a public God and therefore we are public people... Our lives of faith belong in the public sphere... engaging the world face to face... life to life...And the stakes couldn't be higher... We engage the world for the world's redemption no less... As people of faith it is for us to bring well being and dignity to our world now... in the present... Salvation, at least according to scripture, is not about a utopian life after death... but about engendering dignified lives here and now... to bear healing for the world's wounds... amid the fray, amid the social, economic and political fabric of existence... we are an outpost to nurture such lives, and to celebrate such lives, and to praise God, as best we know how for being chosen for such a high calling... There is no

higher calling... this way of Christ... And it is the harder road... It will demand our all, make no mistake about that... It will demand the whole of us... Our flesh, our blood, blessed broken and given for the world's nurture. It is for this high calling that we are made... for this calling we are born... there is nothing, nothing else.

Of the many stories in the Gospels about Jesus' deeds of power, the so-called miracle stories... three fourths of them are stories about healing... I can't think of a better description of salvation than our responsibility to heal... We are to go into the world as did the Christ, no less than the Christ, wounded hearts and all, and bear God's healing touch for the world's brokenness... making miracles out of the spit and mud... And healing is a public enterprise, and it is about earthy touch... it occurs in the messy and intimate commerce of human existence... The profound truth is this... These are the days of miracles and wonder, and we, brothers and sisters are light... Let us be the light of such days... and know that our light is enough.... It is enough even amid the vast precincts of the dark.... As long as we are in the world we are the light of the world... and it is enough... quite enough.