

Charles R. Blaisdell, Senior Pastor
First Christian Church
Colorado Springs, Colorado
December 24, 2014
©2014

Reflect the Light

John 1:1-5 NRSV In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

When I was a toddler, I had a slight speed impediment: I couldn't say my L's correctly and instead often said W's instead. My parents tell the story of a family vacation when I was about three, driving from Texas to Maine in a day before interstates. It was a very long journey and most days of the trip began and ended in darkness. Well, on this trip when as we approached one of the bridges into New York City, it was dark, and I was asleep in the back seat. But as the car crested a slight rise, the nighttime skyline of Manhattan lay in front of us in all its incandescent glory, and I raised up from the back seat where I lay (in those pre-car seat days), rubbed my eyes, and said "My Woord, wook at all the wights!"

What parent doesn't treasure such a memory? – when your child is completely captivated by the extravagant beauty of the world and expresses delight in uninhibited awe and wonder, even if he can't quite pronounce his L's! But it also strikes me that this mispronounced childhood expression of joy would make a pretty good summing up of and response to the Christmas story. And what a needed joy to hear – as John's gospel has it – that the light is coming into the world and that the powers of evil and hate and darkness will not overcome it. Or in Matthew's telling of the Christmas story it was those magi from the east who were so captivated by that dazzling star – "My oord, Look at the light!" – that they made a journey that would enrapture and change them forever. Or I can imagine a three year old with a lisp standing out in the fields with those shepherds in Luke's gospel, a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and

lighting up the sky in glory, saying, indeed, “My woord, wook at all the lights!”

And the encountering of such light can also be a relief, can't it? Have any of you ever been on a cave tour, maybe at Carlsbad or Mammoth caves or Cave of the Winds? At any cave tour I've ever been on, at some point the guide will extinguish all the lights for a few moments. Do you remember what you did, how you felt? An almost-universal reaction is to put your hand right in front of your face to see if you can still see it, to see if there might be some tiny vestige of light to illumine what you know is there. And then for most folks the tiniest feeling of panic to set in. When the lights come back on you blink a time or two and feel relief indeed and gratitude that the darkness did not overcome the light.

Light can also be healing. We've all had the experience of having a nasty cut or scrape and needing at first to bandage it. But soon, if it is to heal as quickly as possible, you need to take that bandage off and expose the wound to the air and the light, for light indeed helps healing happen. Or maybe you are one who has something terrible in your past that is like a black hole around which you carefully creep so that you don't fall in. But then, hopefully in the company of a trusted friend or counselor, you have been able to let the light in on whatever it was that had hurt you and as with a physical scrape or cut, the light slowly helps your scar to heal over and that black hole to go away and no longer trap you with its power.

The Christmas story, whether told in Matthew, Luke, or John, is indeed the story of light, dazzling light, healing light – light that comes as a reassurance that the darkness will not in fact overcome even in the midst of injustice or hate or killing or tragedy. And that is what we have been waiting for and hoping for during the long weeks of Advent as we have honestly acknowledged that there is too much darkness and too much despair. But, my friends, the Christmas story of the coming of the light also offers to us a challenge. It is a challenge that a story by a story that I first heard

from my wife Barbara. Let me tell it you now: The great Greek human rights activist Dr. Alexandros Pappaderos was once asked: "What is the meaning of life?" Here is how he answered: "When I was a boy, during World War II," he said, "I was walking along the road when I came across some shattered pieces of a mirror. It was the rear view mirror of a German soldier's motorcycle, one that had crashed. I sorted through the pieces and kept the largest one." Dr. Pappaderos then stopped, pulled out his wallet and produced a very small mirror, about the size of a quarter. He held it up for all to see and said,

This is it. I [smoothed] its jagged edges into this round shape. I began to play with it as a toy[, for]. I was fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light back into dark places where the sun could never reach: into holes and crevices and closets. It became a game for me - to get light into the most inaccessible places.

[As I grew] up, I would take [that mirror] out at idle moments and continue the challenge of the game. As I grew to be a man, I began to understand that it was not just a child's game. It was a metaphor for what I might do with my life. I am not the light or the source of the light. But the light is there. **And it will shine in many dark places if I reflect it.** ...[With w]hat I am and what I have, I can reflect light into the dark places of the world and into the darkened hearts of some fellow human beings. This is the meaning of my life.¹

My wife comments on this story in this way:

"...we [too] have been made like fragments of a mirror. And God has poured out light on us: a shining love... a luminous hope for the world. And God [did so that we might] reflect that light into the... into the deepest shadows, wherever the light

¹The Rev. Barbara S. Blaisdell, "Mirrors and Rainbows," a sermon preached at Hilo Coast United Church of Christ, Honomu, Hawaii, August 28, 2005. Emphasis mine.

of God's love has been blocked out.”²

The challenge and opportunity amidst the Christmas story, my friends, is to indeed be a reflection of that light that comes this night and will not be overcome.

- It is our challenge and opportunity to reflect that light as we give our offering for the needy in our community through the ministry of ESM, and for those children at the Tennyson Center who have been hurt by the ones that they should have been able to trust the most
- It is our challenge and opportunity to reflect that light when we are tempted to complain about our first-world problems of parking spaces and to-do lists, in a world where there are more than one billion people, most of them children, who live in poverty,³ and the same number who do not have the most basic of hygiene available that we take for granted when we turn a lever.
- It is our challenge and opportunity to reflect the light, when too many communities fear each other and turn violence on each other because of what we've taught each other to mistakenly believe about skin color's relationship to character.⁴
- It is our challenge and opportunity to reflect that light when we remember those 1.2 billion people in our world who have not been told the story of Jesus, and even more if you “count those who have heard of the church and Jesus but have been taught to associate it with judgment, bigotry, colonialism and hate.”⁵
- It is our challenge and opportunity to reflect that light as we reach out to those in our family and among our friends who know too little light and who live lives

²Barbara Blaisdell, “Learning to Wait: III. Waiting on the Light,” a sermon preached at First Christian Church, Tacoma, Washington, December 14, 2014.

³ibid.

⁴I owe this formulation to Katherine Ann Shires Blaisdell in an email exchange.

⁵Barbara Blaisdell, ibid.

closeted in despair or resentment or anger or fear.

Oh my yes, the story of this night is a wonderful one indeed – “My Woord, wook at all the lights!” – but it is also an **opportunity and challenge** to recommit ourselves to being, like living pieces of Dr. Pappaderos’ mirror, people who live in such a way that we too reflect the light of healing and hope into the darkness. Tonight we have sung *“Hail! the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail! the Son of Righteousness! Light and life to all He brings, Risen with healing in His wings.... Born that we no more may die.”* My friends, on this night I bid you to leave this place, look up, look around you, revel in the light of healing and hope that is not, cannot, will not be overcome – and then go and reflect it. Amen.