

Rejoice in the Lord Always *Light in the Darkness*

Text: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 (Series B, 3rd Sunday of Advent) Ps. 126

John 1:6-8, 19-28

God sent his messenger, a man named John, who came to tell people about the light, so that all should hear the message, and believe. He himself was not the light; he came to tell about the light. This was the real light – the light that comes into the world and shines on all people.

Let us pray

In the Bible and in literature, generally darkness is associated with things that are bad, evil and with death. And it is no different today; under the cover of darkness, many crimes are committed. We think of many acts of cruelty and violence as coming from our dark side. Death is described as something dark and sinister.

There is a city located in the very north of Norway, an ordinary city except for the months of November through to January when the sun does not rise above the horizon. I've read that during this period of perpetual night, "*Those who are emotionally healthy the rest of the year become tense, fearful, and preoccupied with thoughts of suicide. During this period of darkness the least desirable elements in humanity come to the surface: envy, greed, suspicion, crime. The citizens long for the light and hate to be alone. They install neon lights around their windows*".

Darkness in people's lives can differ from one person to the next. The darkness may be endless poverty. There are so many hungry, homeless people in our world even though there is plenty of food and space.

For another person, darkness is the way we are destroying the earth through pollution and waste – leaving our children and grandchildren a planet that is only a shadow of its former beauty.

To a child in a war-torn country, the darkness is foreign troops driving through his / her village, each plundering, killing, raping, and striking fear into the hearts of those who are left. To a mother, the darkness is trying to get enough food to feed her children or to find adequate shelter.

For another person, darkness is struggling with an illness, the aches and pains of old age, loneliness, losing the struggle with failing abilities, and entering a nursing home. For some, darkness is the impending death of a loved one.

Whatever is your or my temptation – the darkness within us comes out in sinful words and deeds. Hatred. Greed. Doing what we please, even though our actions have a detrimental affect on others and even on ourselves. Turning away from a person in need. Selfishness. All the things that Satan, the prince of darkness, brings into our lives.

Make no mistake there is darkness inside us. It is the darkness of sin. To deny it, is to deny who we are as human beings. How does darkness manifest itself in our life? What outward words and actions do we know are not what God wants from his people, yet we keep banging at it? In fact, sometimes the darkness becomes so much a part of our way of living that we have difficulty recognizing that the darkness is something evil in whatever shape and form it presents itself.

Some mistake darkness for the light. They say that they are enlightened because they don't have any hang-ups. They are enlightened because they enjoy sexual freedom, drugs, and using people for their own gain. They are unscrupulous in their business dealings and unsympathetic to those who have fallen on tough times - after all, it's their own fault. Some may call this being enlightened, but to God's way of thinking, it is darkness.

Today, our text focuses on John the Baptist. Last week, we saw him in the wilderness calling out to all who came to hear him, *"Repent. Turn away from your sin. Be baptized and God will forgive your sin"*. Today, we hear John being quizzed by the religious leaders about his identity. Who is he? Is he Elijah, a prophet, even the Messiah? John makes it quite clear who he is. He is the voice. *"I am the voice of someone shouting in the wilderness,"* John says. He is the voice who has *come to tell about the light. This was the real light – the light that comes into the world and shine on all people."*

The prophet Isaiah talked about the dawn of God's light in the world and its effect. *"Arise, Jerusalem, shine like the sun; the glory of the Lord is shining on you. Other nations will be covered with darkness, but on you the light of the Lord will shine. ... Your days of grief will come to an end. I, the Lord, will be your eternal light" (Isaiah 60:1,2,20).*

The New Testament link to this Hebrew Scripture is found in John's Gospel when Jesus speaks about himself; *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness" (John 8:12)*. The prophecies of the Old Testament

have been fulfilled. What an impact Christ the light has had on the darkness in our lives and in the world!

As we prepare for the Christmas season light plays a significant part. Driving around the darkened streets in Brossard or NDG, you see houses decorated with lights. What is normally just an ordinary house suddenly draws our attention with the addition of hundreds of tiny light bulbs.

Many people have decorated Christmas trees in their homes and an important feature is the lights. The lights change an ordinary-looking tree into something magnificent. John the Baptist said that Jesus is the real light, the genuine light that changes things.

- He is forgiveness. He is hope.
- He is encouragement. He is a word of love. He is strength.
- He is what we need to lighten our personal darkness.
- He is light to every person who has need of super-human strength to see through the darkness of trouble and sickness.
- He is the light who guides us along life's journey when we have more questions than we have answers.
- He is the light that dispels the darkness of guilt with his forgiveness and the darkness of fear when we take our last breath. He is the light of life, eternal life.

Whatever way darkness presents itself in our lives, Christ has come to be a light for us. Wherever there is darkness in our family, in our friendships, in our community, Christ has come to shed light on all those areas of our lives to restore peace and harmony and joy.

Wherever there is darkness in our nation or in the world at large, Christ has commanded us to let our light shine before people, to use whatever means we have at our disposal to relieve the suffering of others and drive out the darkness that shrouds the lives of so many. We are to let the light of Christ shine through us so that the darkness of evil might be dispelled.

Pastor Vince Gerhardy of Australia told a story that in 1981 thousands of people suffered from an influenza epidemic in Australia. During the height of that plague, churches and all public gathering places were ordered closed in order to stem the spread of the disease. Yet, more than ever, the people needed hope and consolation.

Burdened by his inability to reach out to people in their time of need, one resourceful pastor thought of his church and its magnificent stained glass windows. Those windows faced a main street and many people passed by the church every day.

The pastor had numerous floodlights placed inside the church; the light shining through the glass to the outside world gave passers-by the full effect of the windows' story. There for all to see were the timeless portrayals of Jesus:

- Jesus the good shepherd carrying a lamb;
- Jesus the searching Saviour rescuing the lone lost sheep while the ninety-nine rested safely in the fold; Jesus praying in Gethsemane;
- Jesus on the cross; Jesus risen from the dead.

The silent sermons of light and stained glass spoke an eloquent message. People who passed by the church would stop reverently, silently. They found themselves filled with new hope and encouragement. In the darkness that filled their lives, the light streaming from those windows reminded them of *"the real light – the light that comes into the world and shines on all people"*, to use John's words.

When we look at the little child in the manger at Christmas, look at the one who will meet us at our point of darkness, whatever that darkness is for you and I. His love never changes. In his light, we find the strength to carry on. In his light, the darkness is replaced with hope, peace, joy, love, and forgiveness. **Amen.**

NOTE:

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

As you all know, we are planning two services on Christmas Eve, one at 3:00 PM and one at 5:00 PM. We are taking reservations for these services, as the current provincial regulations only allow for 25 people to be in the Sanctuary at any given time. At this point, there remains only one spot left for the 3:00 PM service.

There are 11 spots free for the 5:00 PM service. Those wishing to secure a place should contact Roger, either by email or by phone. (Await confirmation. Email will be confirmed. Do not rely on a phone message until he has gotten back to confirm).

We are not taking reservations for the Christmas Day service at 11:00 AM because this service is not traditionally well-attended. People should plan to arrive a bit earlier than usual, in case something changes.

December 13, 2020