

Advent 4, 2017  
Overcoming the Darkness  
Jeremiah 33:7-16 / 1 Thessalonians 1  
St. Andrew's – Jacksonville, OR  
By Fr. Bill Baker

“The big sun comes out, the dew falls away, good morning, good morning the little birds say.” I don’t know if you are familiar with this little nursery rhyme, but it is well known in our home. Often as I am awaking from my slumber I will hear Andrea coaxing Lizzy from her sleep with this short verse, bringing a smile to her little face. These words and this gesture of love are compelling because they are a reminder that the dark night has passed and a new day has dawned; that the darkness has been transformed by the light.

As we come to the end of the Advent season we too are reminded of the heaviness of the winter solstice. These are the shortest days of the year and hence the longest nights. The darkness seems to be prevailing over the light and ironically pulls many into a depression even in this most glorious of seasons of the church year. It always puzzles me how crime and suicide rates increase during such a most wondrous time of year. What is it about the darkness that causes our spirits to turn downward and introvert into our own deprivation? The absence of light, can cause a feeling of being abandoned, a fear of the unknown and the need of rescue. Several years ago I was privileged to live in Germany. Behind my dwelling was an old farming road by which I would walk to town. I was very familiar with the road and enjoyed the views over the fields. But one night I was walking home in the dark down this same familiar road; it wasn’t the same. Nothing was familiar. I recognized how alone I was. Something sinister seemed to lay ahead if I continued and a fear lay upon me, so much so that I turned back toward town to walk home another way. I never again attempted that road...not even during the day.

The stories that hold the night involve monsters and boogiemens, reminding us that it is time to lock our doors and turn on the porch light. And I don’t recall having nightmares during my mid-day naps as a child, they only occurred after dark. In the darkness our vision is blunted and our certainty diminished.

In the spiritual sense the darkness also distorts the light; love turns to lust, wants become needs, material objects become a form of worship...truth becomes clouded giving way to ulterior motives. A perfect example the darkness's distorting power came the other night while Andrea and I were watching a re-run of Good Times. JJ, the oldest son, had painted a picture depicting his own image of what Jesus looked like and it was hung on the wall. Immediately good things began to happen for everyone in the family and the Jesus painting got all the credit. The father won a large amount of money from a horse race (after he had told his wife he had quit gambling), the youngest son earned five dollars by exploiting two victims of a car crash, their daughter got invited to a rock concert she couldn't get tickets to where she was excited to be among those of ill repute. The most shocking miracle claimed to be given by Jesus through this painting was to the neighbor who had just received a call from a previous date wanting an adulterous affair. Her excitement and willingness to give in was found in her discovery of his wealth. After claiming their miracles, each of them would give thanks to the painting in a high-five sort of way. Distortion. Sin has darkened the waters and some have accepted the lie that persists in the gloom.

Is it ironic that we celebrate the birth of our Savior during the darkest time of the year? Is it really a pagan diversion that brought us to celebrate the birth of Jesus on December 25<sup>th</sup>...the time of the winter solstice? However we may reconcile the date it is appropriate that the celebration of the new light found in Jesus Christ comes at a time when the darkness...is the greatest. It is during this season of the year where we can truly acknowledge how Sin has abandoned our eternal life only to be reconciled by God Almighty in the God-Man Jesus Christ who came to us as a babe. And we are here to celebrate that very gift!

We have hearkened to the words of the prophet Jeremiah today. Jeremiah's overall theological insight rests in his emphasis on the Exodus: the Hebrew's deliverance from slavery and a covenantal promise to maintain a lasting relationship with the one true God; in a sense...an escape from the darkness through the promise of a new light. Listen once again to Jeremiah's words, *"I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and will rebuild them as they were before. I will cleanse*

*them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me.”* And then we get this declaration from God also through Jeremiah, *“The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. In those days and at that time I will make a righteous branch sprout from David’s line...”* Do you sense something big on the horizon? Could a new day be dawning?

Through the first Adam we fell captive to the darkness of sin and were placed in bondage to it. We were lost to what was once familiar because the truth slipped into shadow and all seemed lost. While these last days of the winter solstice show us the power of darkness they also remind of our hope in the New Light, a righteous branch has been promised, a new light is at hand; The prophet Isaiah tells us, *“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined”* (Isaiah 9:2).

The first Adam fell to Satan willingly and the darkness of sin encroached the light. It would take the divine will of the second Adam to overcome humanity’s suffering and loss...it would take the hidden plan of God to crush the serpents head and shine the light perpetual once again upon the human race. In Jesus Christ there is once again a mass exodus from false gods. Paul has reminded us today of our deliverance from sin and that we are new creatures in a new covenantal relationship with our heavenly Father. *“For we know brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.”* In our darkened states we can still welcome the Gospel light by the power of the Holy Spirit trusting in a babe lying in a manger who will *“rescue us from the coming wrath.”* The light is within you...healing your hearts, healing your souls and healing your minds to love God more perfectly. When the darkness seems to be prevailing and the light seems dim, remember...the darkness shall not win the day. With this solstice we celebrate the light when it is most threatened knowing that He who made the light is unconquerable. Maximus of Turin, a fifth century writer said this, *“The people are quite right, in a way, when they call this birthday of the Lord ‘the new sun’.* We gladly accept the name, because at the coming of the savior not only is humankind saved but the very light of the sun is renewed.”

Life, salvation, righteousness...all part of the light conceived in Mary's womb and given to the world. Next time you find yourself afraid of the dark remember that you are a new creature in Christ Jesus and He who is within you is greater than he who is in the world...and so, let your lights shine before men.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.