



“A Royal Welcome: Welcoming Light”

Rev. Dr. Michael L. Gregg

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Christmas Eve Service

Throughout Advent we have welcomed, in Royal Lane fashion, hope, peace, joy, and love into the world. And we have definitely needed these small, flickering lights to grow each week and to help push out the weary and dreary places in our lives. And that’s why it is important for us to light the large Christ candle that will beam brightly and to then share our individual lights with one another as we take the light of Christ out in our community. Tonight, we welcome light.

But tonight, we are also reminded that the Christmas story began in darkness. There was the darkness of oppression, for God’s people were a defeated and dominated people. There was the darkness of persecution and pain as Mary and Joseph labored to get to Bethlehem for the despised taxation that brought the weary world together, masses looking for relief. There was the darkness of disillusionment as those in power wanted to rule with strength rather than faith. Yes, on that first Christmas, the mood was one of despair and doubt... of darkness.

And just like then, we too feel as if we are living in a world of darkness. There are wars and rumors of wars, failed leadership, hunger and unemployment, racism, loneliness, and a sense of emptiness. Perhaps the poet Robert Frost worded it best when he wrote: “I have been acquainted with the night. I have walked in the rain and out of the rain. I have been acquainted with the night.” And I know I don’t have to tell any of you about the darkness, because in one form or another, at one time or another, it has touched all of our lives. We have all been acquainted with the night. We do not come here this evening to foolishly deny the existence of the darkness. We can indeed learn from the darkness and grow in the darkness. Darkness is always with us. Nowhere in scripture does it say that life will never have its nights, its time of darkness. Darkness is a true and present reality.

Yet, the gospel, the good news of Christmas, is that in the midst of a deep darkness there came a light, and the darkness was not able to overcome that light. It was not just a temporary flicker like the lights in the Advent wreath or the candles we will hold in our hands. No, the illumination of Christ was an eternal flame. We need to remember that. There are times, in the events of the world and in the events of our own personal lives, that we feel that the light might grow dim or soon be snuffed out. But the Christmas story affirms that whatever happens, no matter how terrible things might feel, the small and growing lights of hope, peace, joy, and love will always shine. And it is a strong and eternal light.

Just like the magi, as the strong and sturdy light brightened the darkness, we too follow the light to God born in the world. And the light of Christ is resilient and bright. And, as we stand at the threshold of the Christ Child’s birth, the manger already stands in the shadow of the cross. Jesus is the light of the world and his sacrifice means we can share his light to all people. But, the light

is unlike a gift that when given, leaves the giver with less. Instead, after the light is shared, both candles glow with equal brightness. The light multiplies exponentially as it is passed to one another. Just as a single candle sheds light and illuminates an entire room, the life of one person, Jesus Christ, casts light on all the darkness of the world.

When the service is concluded and when you walk outside this evening, notice that the darkness does not intrude upon or overcome the light. No, it is the light that pushes away and overcomes the darkness. Light is always stronger than darkness. So, when we leave here tonight, the birth of Christ beckons us to be light-bearers to a troubled and hurting world. Although you will snuff out your candle before leaving, you must keep your passionate lights burning brightly so others can follow the presence of Christ in your life. By welcoming the light tonight, you will illuminate the darkened path, shining justice and hope and salvation to all.

Marjorie Tallcott was married and had one child during the Great Depression. The family managed to scrape their way through. But one year, as Christmas approached, Marjorie and her husband were disappointed that they would not be able to buy any presents. A week before Christmas they explained to their six-year-old son, Pete, that there would be no store-bought presents this Christmas. “But I’ll tell you what we can do” said Pete’s father, “we can make pictures of the presents we’d like to give to each other.”

That was a busy week. Marjorie and her husband set to work. Christmas Day arrived and the family rose to find their skimpy little tree made magnificent by the picture presents they had adorned it with. There was luxury beyond imagination in those pictures – a black limousine and red speedboat for Dad, a diamond bracelet and fur coat for mom, a camping tent and a swimming pool for Pete. Then Pete pulled out his present, a crayon drawing of a man, a woman, and a child with their arms around each other laughing. Under the picture was just one word: “US”.

Years later Marjorie writes that it was the richest, most satisfying Christmas they ever had. It took a present-less Christmas to remind Marjorie and her family that the greatest gift we can ever offer is ourselves, our presence. This too is the great gift that Christ offers us, not only at Christmas but throughout the year – himself. If he was to draw a gift perhaps it would be just like Pete’s: three people with their arms around each other laughing – human community with Christ at the center.

As we move into a time of communion, we remember that Christ offered the gift of himself to a hurting world. I have often had people wonder why we serve communion on Christmas Eve. We do so because that is the gift that communion gives us, the gift of presence. When we partake of the bread and the cup, we remember and recognize the presence of Jesus in our lives. We experience the gift of community and the presence of the people as we partake in this act together. And, we do so on Christmas Eve, because we celebrate the presence of Christ born in a manger in Bethlehem. Christ is coming into the world to show us love and to rescue us from despair. That is why communion is so important. In communion we experience the presence and light of Christ. So, let us welcome the light of life.