

John 1:1-18, 9:5

Waiting for Light

The other morning I got up and realized that at 7:50 am daylight had not yet started to break through. It didn't take long. By 8:30 it was full daylight, but I remember the "ugh" as I looked out the window to see our motion sensor light had come on due to movement of the neighbour's dog. There is a heaviness about darkness, especially when it is morning and it feels hard to get the day started. I would not do well as a shift worker! All the credit to them.

One needs to be careful when we speak about dark and light. There is absolute beauty in dark skin and black hair. I wear a lot of dark clothing because it seems I have a difficult time getting food from my plate to my mouth without some of it landing on me, so dark clothes it is, to hide how messy and clumsy I am.

And a night sky with stars that twinkle and sparkle have been the backdrop for many romances sparked and emboldened during an evening out. The night can and has captivated the imagination of poets, artists, and musician with all finding ways to create beauty. One of the most recognizable paintings in the world is Van Gogh's *Starry Night*. There is something about that night sky that attracts and resonates with people.

What one may not know about the painting is that in its beauty its history is that it was created at a time that Van Gogh had relapsed into a dark period in his life. He began to suffer hallucination and have thoughts of suicide as he plunged into depression.¹ And that is the side of darkness that is difficult – darkness that feels like the light is missing in our lives and in the world.

Reading the newspaper, listening to the news, or checking out a newsfeed, one can hardly comprehend how much darkness we have in the world. News reports people found dead on our streets, an opioid crisis, home takeovers, children slain in their schools, governments and authorities continuing to struggle in the face of a global pandemic.

That is what's in the news, but we also have families and businesses in financial crisis, spousal and child abuse, homelessness, and suicide. Just last week I was speaking with someone who works with indigenous families and he spoke about the number of young people who commit suicide. We are talking teenagers whose deaths we never hear about in our local news. They have taken their own lives because they cannot see a way out of the darkness that surrounds them and their families. Hope illudes them.

¹ <https://www.vangoghgallery.com/painting/starry-night.html>. Accessed December 3, 2021.

Darkness has drawn so tightly around them as to consume them. They can see no hope, no light.

I have spoken before about my own journey through depression, a time when I had three beautiful little children who smiled and laughed and played and I could not fully appreciate all that I had. Darkness in my soul and mind had made joy illusive, happiness the story of other people's lives. I am one of the fortunate ones who had family that recognized my plight and insisted that I get help. I also give thanks for medications, my doctor, my therapist, and prayer. It took all of this to get me well and whole again. With help darkness turned to light, joy, hope.

John's gospel has the line in this opening text that reads, "What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." I confess, these first eighteen verses of the Gospel of John are some of my favorites in the Bible. It wasn't always that way. It had all seemed rather cryptic to me. I didn't understand that "the Word" that was in the beginning and that was with God and was God, was referring to Jesus. Jesus was "the Word" made flesh. Jesus was the Word that without him, not one thing came into being and "What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people."

Jesus was light. Jesus is light.

We forgot how powerful light is. We are so used to flicking a switch and having light that we forget that it was not so for centuries. Light came from fire, whether a candle, a torch, or a lantern. Our experience of light in an instant is a very modern concept. Heck even our cell phones come with built in flashlights. There is rarely an occasion where we don't have access to light. And in this season of Christmas, we even get to experience an array of lights in shapes and colours that bring beauty into the evening.

Jesus came into the world when light was precious, took time, and did not illumine all things as the flames could not reach all the corners of a room. Jesus also came at a time when the Roman empire was ruthless in its expansion and authority. The Roman army struck fear into those who might come against its power and resources. When the writer of the Gospel of John talked about Jesus being light shining in the darkness, it spoke volumes to those who heard it because of their lived experience.

The people of the First Testament or what we call the Old Testament had for decades longed for, had waited for a king that would rise up from the lineage of King David. This was their "make us great again" hope. Poetry and prose spoke to this hope. It would be a light in the darkness of their time to have the yearning fulfilled. Oppression had been their experience and it seemed to them that God had fallen silent. They were longing for power and control over their own way of being in the world. The people were longing for a light that would dispel the darkness of power and authority that ruled over them.

When Jesus stepped into ministry in what was likely his early thirties, many saw him as the fulfilment of the hope of Israel. A new king to overthrow the Romans and restore

Israel to a former glory. They wanted him to step up and rule the world as they knew it and hoped for.

As they say, hindsight is 20/20, and after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, those who had followed Jesus began to understand his words and actions in a new way. They saw that their vision for Jesus' rule had been limited by their narrow view of how the world and those who live in it might have rule and authority, but Jesus as the light of the world, came not just for a few, but that all might have life and have it abundantly.

Jesus' life was a light for all people. I have to say, coming to write this service about light and as we light the candle of peace has not been easy after the conversation I had about the number of indigenous youth that feel completely hopeless and by an encounter in our parking lot at the church on Wednesday night. I came out of the church to find a very inebriated man falling, trying to stand, and failing over and over again. As I came close, I could see that his nose was bleeding and he was in crisis in many ways. I immediately called 911 and got him help, but not before watching him stumble across Brodie Street falling before a bus had to go around him. He was far too heavy and out of his senses for me to be able to manage him by myself so all I could do was wait helplessly. I waited for help, waited for the light of the ambulance to come and rescue him. I drove away from that moment thinking, "God, how in the world am I to preach your Good News when everything feels so dark, so bleak, particularly for some."

I still don't really know how to preach it, but as I reflect on my waiting to see the lights of the ambulance in the dark of the evening, coming to rescue the man, I think that Jesus coming into the world is something akin to that. We need rescuing from the powers of darkness in our world, in our minds, in our hearts, and in our homes. Jesus is that light. Jesus is that hope and just maybe, if we strive to live our lives in the spirit of Jesus we will experience Jesus light, but we will also be that light to others. Sometime the light is like a far-off star, sometimes it is as bright as a trouble light shining directly on us.

My hope for you, for our community, and for our world is that light will shine in the darkness, because the darkness cannot overcome the light of Jesus. It is up to us to shine that light on the world, just as God continues to bring that light of Jesus in to the world, into each of us, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

As Jesus said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Amen.