

ADVENT THREE, YEAR B, DECEMBER 10, 2023

At this time of the year darkness is more prevalent than the light. Darkness can have a very powerful effect on all of us at some time. We know that darkness affects peoples behavior and differs from one person to the next. What I do know is that darkness takes away freedom, joy, peace of mind, and lots of other things.

The darkness may be poverty, hunger and homelessness. It may be the hopelessness of a single mother as she struggles to provide basic food, clean water and health care for her children.

The darkness may be the questions, doubts, anger and despair after a sudden and inexplicable death or a diagnosis that comes out of the blue.

For another person, darkness is struggling with an illness, the aches and pains of old age, losing the struggle with failing abilities. For some darkness is looking to the day when they lose a loved one through death.

To a child in a war torn country, the darkness is armed men plundering and killing and being afraid that they will be abducted or abused or even be killed.

To some darkness is looking into the face of death and only seeing hopelessness, an end, extinction, nothing to look forward to beyond that last breath.

All of us have our own personal darkness. It might be a short fuse or how annoyed we get with certain people. It can be some kind of addiction, impatience, selfishness.

It's good every now and then to stop and think about how darkness manifests itself in our lives? In what ways do our words and actions arise from this darkness? It can happen that we can be in the dark and not even realize it. It's like those occasions when we are sitting in a room that has gradually darkened and the difference it makes when the light is turned on.

At the beginning of the Advent season we have John the Baptist sticking his head into the rooms of our darkened lives and asking, "Do you want me to turn the light on?" But John points out that he isn't the light. John says, "I am the messenger sent by God. I have come to tell you about the light. This is the real light – the light that comes into the world and shines on all people".

Those who like the dark will not appreciate this light because this light exposes what is hidden in the hearts of all people. This light will reveal all including the darkness in our own lives. That's why we need to hear John's wild call again and again, "Turn away from your darkness. Get ready. The Kingdom of God is coming soon."

The light John is referring to not only exposes what is hidden in the darkness but is also a comforting light. The source of the light is Christ himself. He is love and he brings hope and peace and joy. He is the one to whom John pointed, the promised Messiah – the one who will bring healing and love. That's what we celebrate today on this Sunday of Joy. The light that shines in each of us – the light of Christ even when we don't see it ourselves.

A friend of mine, Elizabeth Kaeton, is a hospice chaplain and she wrote this the other day that fits perfectly with John's message.

"Everyone seems to be turning to the light, looking for the light amid the darkness. We do that in our outer and physical lives as well as in our interior lives of emotion and spirit.

I had a wonderful visit with a Hospice couple in their nineties yesterday. They are both pretty amazing people but he is blind, which you'd never know from watching him move about the house. He fell and broke his leg a few years back which, he says, never really healed right "so it catches me when I get up after sitting down for awhile." "Do you take something for the pain?" I asked. "No," he smiled, "I just try to remember not to sit for too long.

But, I want to talk about the light in his face, the light in his eyes. Last visit, he asked me if I liked coffee. Yes, I told him, I love coffee. In fact, every morning I have the best cup of coffee in the whole world.

I told him the story of the three comedians who were in their nineties being asked the secret of their long life and one of them answered about how he is grateful, every morning, for the best cup of coffee in the whole world, and the appreciation and gratitude for the little, the simple things, in life.

He asked me if I liked instant or Keurig or perked coffee. I confessed that I only used instant coffee in some recipes and only drank Keurig if it was the only thing offered but my clear preference was for perked or brewed coffee.

Ah, he said, I make a great pot of coffee but she doesn't drink coffee so I don't make a whole pot very often. I'll make a pot when you come back.

When I arrived at his door yesterday he greeted me with, "Oh, good, I knew you would keep your promise. I knew you'd be here." His whole, entire face lit up.

"Of course," I said, "I've been looking forward to seeing you again and the conversations we'll have."

He stopped, looked at me with his blind eyes, saw right through me and that I had forgotten his promise about the coffee, and said, "I just made a fresh pot of coffee. It just stopped perking when you came to the driveway. Come on in. You can help me with the hard part - getting it from the kitchen to the living room."

I wish you could have seen his face when we were in the kitchen together, making tea for his spouse and coffee for us. I wish you could have seen his eyes light up when I sipped the coffee and pronounced it better than the cup I had had that morning.

I wish you could have seen the glow on the face of the woman with whom he has been married 72 years when she saw him so happy and so deeply pleased not only to have made a delicious cup of coffee but to finally have someone with whom to share it.

Sometimes, when you live in expectation and anticipation, you can walk right into the true depth of the meaning of a Spiritual Season, without even knowing it." She then posted this poem by Jan Richardson, a priest, called, 'Where the Light Begins'

WHERE THE LIGHT BEGINS

Perhaps it does not begin.

Perhaps it is always.

Perhaps it takes
a lifetime

to open our eyes,

to learn to see

what has forever

shimmered in front of us—

the luminous line
of the map
in the dark
the vigil flame
in the house
of the heart
the love
so searing
we cannot keep
from singing,
from crying out
in testimony
and praise.
Perhaps this day
will be the mountain
over which
the dawn breaks.
Perhaps we
will turn our face
toward it,
toward what has been
always.
Perhaps
our eyes
will finally open
in ancient recognition,
willingly dazzled,
illuminated at last.
Perhaps this day
the light begins
in us.

Elizabeth concluded, "I hope that happens for you, today. I hope you are able to see and experience and sip light and peace, hope and joy. It comes when you make and keep a promise. It comes when your heart is filled with gratitude and you share what you have. It comes when you see past your own blindness into the potential for goodness in others."

On this third Sunday of Advent, the Sunday of Joy let our faces and hearts turn towards the light that is coming into the world once again to dispel the darkness and blind us with the goodness and love and light of God. Amen.