

**Lectionary 33 + November 19, 2017**

“Let your light so shine before others”

These or similar words are spoken when the light is presented to the newly baptized. It is a commissioning. The charge is to let your light shine for all to see.

We share the light in the church community and in the world where we work and play and serve. We share nothing less than the love of God.

Back in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says let your light shine. No one, says Jesus, lighting a lamp would hide it under a bushel basket. Rather, the lamp would be on the lampstand to light up all the room. Don't hide your light like placing a basket over a lamp.

Still, we find that we do. I wonder what prevents us from sharing the light of Christ. St. Paul says we are children of the light. Children of the day, called to show forth love. Oh, how we love so to sing “This little light of mine” and “I want to walk as a Child of the Light.” Still, the human journey is complicated and nuanced and, yes, marred by sin. We want to sequester the light.

- Maybe we've convinced ourselves that we don't have light to share
- Maybe we are just down defiant at times to the ways of God. Be thankful you don't have preaching every Sunday like Zephaniah's, but don't disregard the aim if the tone isn't very nice. He is preaching to a people who have become complacent.
- Maybe we are remiss in sharing the light because we are afraid and when we are afraid we do not take risks. We hold onto tightly, afraid to “let go.”

In the Parable of the Talents, two slaves make good on what the Master has given them. The third slave digs a hole and buries his talent in the ground. He was afraid. He didn't risk using what the Master gave him. Fear got the best of him. While the master was away, two slaves took great risks. You could say they let their light shine brightly for all the world to see and to know.

God, the great freedom giver and the great lover, commands us to let light shine so that the world may know the love of God and we are commissioned to share that love in passionate, generous and even reckless ways.

So, what makes us afraid?

- Is it the fear of taking a risk or going out on a limb? Ever felt like you wanted to speak up for someone maligned or speak an unpopular truth but didn't because the consequences were too great?
- Is it fearing of the dark? Daily, we are surrounded by news of grave injustice done to nations and communities and individuals. We wonder, "what's the use! Nothing seems to be getting better."
- Fear comes, too, from entertaining an unhealthy notion of God. God as cosmic bully or God as stern and unforgiving judge. As such we suffer the illusion that being Christian means that we are somehow meant to be perfect.

When we are afraid we hold on tightly to what has been entrusted to us and we cannot let it go.

Friends in Christ: Hear the good news. Do not be afraid. How many times in the Bible do angels proclaim this very message? More times that I can count. We need not be afraid. St. Paul says, "God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation" —

These final weeks in November focus on the so-called "end times." The point isn't to foster fear but to be renewed in faith and in hope. The good news is that Christ's final coming will be like his first coming — marked by mercy.

In the narthex, you'll see the art display featuring Luther's famous quotes as the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation winds down. My favorite is this:

"If I knew the world were to come to an end tomorrow, I would plant a tree today."

That's similar to a Jewish saying "If you have a sapling in your hand and they tell you the Messiah has arrived, first plant the sapling and then go out to greet him."

These are statements of hope that whatever we put our mind to or whatever we do to get our hands dirty in our everyday living we do as a gesture of hope and God, in God's good time, will cause every act of hope to flourish even into eternity.

In light of God's all-reconciling love, we live today.

I saw my first Christmas sighting, not yesterday or last week but in mid-October. I thought, "really!" I was reminded, again, that the winter holiday revolves around the values of consumerism and profit. Oh, how counter-cultural is the Gospel! Even more urgent to let our light so shine.

Advent, a couple of weeks away, is a season brimming with hope. In Advent, we live in the light of Christø coming again. Just so, what would it look like for us to practice hope not in some ethereal sense but in earthy ways.

How might we practice hope this Advent?

- Plan a tree today
- Visit a sick friend today
- Give bread to a hungry neighbor today
- Seek justice today
- Light a candle to the Holy Spirit today
- Dwell in the gift of forgiveness today
- Plant a garden today
- Go green today
- Tell the good news or Godø love to someone who knows not love today
- Join a small group today
- Start a small group today
- Sponsor a refugee today
- Serve the poor today

It is an awesome thing to let our light so shine. And, it is a little scary. For me, the awe and fear of letting our light shine stems from the fact that the light of Christ is unlike any other. The way of the Cross is both thrilling and frightening for who really wants Jesus to rock their world and turn it upside down and inside out. We rather enjoy our complacent ways.

Jesusøword is unlike any other word í

- Love and pray for your enemies
- Take the log out of your own eye before removing the speck in anotherø eye
- Turn toward the poor and outcast not out of seasonal charity but because in the least and last and lost you discover the very face of Jesus
- Be reconciled to one another
- Donø let the sun go down on your anger

The fear comes, I think, from the prospect of taking risks.

As we venture into the winter holiday season, maybe, dear church, we can have some fun relishing our countercultural ways. In view of Jesus coming again, what might it be like to let light shine in the darkest item of the year?

What will we do today?

Do not be afraid. For the light, we are meant to shine isn't our light, after all. It is the light of Christ who is at work in us and through. So, we pray that God will teach us to number our days and apply our hearts to wisdom. Amen.