

## The Light

Let's face it, we **are** a people who live in darkness, we indeed live in a land of deep darkness.

It is the darkness that falls across us when we come to a place in our culture that leads us to believe that this life is somehow far away from and totally separate from the kingdom of God.

It is the darkness that falls across us when we put our faith in America First, in weapons of mass destruction, in our bank accounts, rather than in self-giving love, in a pouring out of ourselves for the sake of one another.

It is the worst kind of darkness because our poor substitutes for what is "really real" mistake a mere light bulb for the sun.

And so we gather tonight, to remember once again, who we really are and to recall the truth of our destiny.

We gather tonight to once again dare to look past the light bulb, to gaze directly into the sun: for then we shall become a people who **has** seen a great light, a people **on whom** a great light has shined.

For too many years, the church has taught its people that the sum and substance of faith is to straighten up, follow the rules and wait till you die for a taste of heaven.

We have taught for years that a select few can be set aside to live the spiritual life, so that everyone else can get on with the messy business of fighting wars and making money and holding on to political power.

How many people will never think of sticking their head in a church because of the way church was presented by a priest, or a parent or someone else of influence?

How many were taught, quite wrongly, that religion is all about saving our individual necks, that God is the morals police, and if you mess up, whether by divorce or drinking or if you don't fit into the straightjacket of socially acceptable gender or sexual roles, or or or...the list, after all, is endless .... then you're in big trouble?

No wonder so many folks don't walk, but run from this place.

But what if that is not our faith?

What if that stuff is all about us trying to make God look like us rather than us changing to look more like God?

What if the meaning of this night has nothing to do with shaping up and flying right, and everything to do with a God who is so crazy in love with all of creation that God becomes one with creation; and in the process sets in motion the mystical, magical path by which all of creation, including every last human being, will someday become one with God?

The mystery that we come to remember tonight, to become part of again tonight, is that on a particular night in human history, in a particular place, and to two particular parents, the Creator of all things becomes one with creation - becomes a human being.

"Meaning that, it is in God's commitment to bodies that **our bodies** matter; that God's determination to be known in the flesh means that doing ministry **in the flesh** matters." Karoline Lewis, paraphrased.

Meaning that, what matters is not what may or may not happen after we close our eyes for the last time in death, what matters is the life we are living, here, now.

That as much as this holy night teaches us something about God — that God is gracious and full of humility, that God adores each and every human person — this night also teaches us about ourselves: that our destiny is to be united with God, to become become One with God.

That's a pretty far cry from what most folks take as religion: reducing it to making sure I've said the right words to save my own neck when the time comes sometime after this life has been lived.

True faith is an invitation to step into the kingdom of God **today**; and we enter that narrow door through the practice of compassion; through the discipline of forgiving those who hurt us; through the fearlessness of trusting that in all things God is faithful — and that therefore all shall be well and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.

Unity with God.

That is the high calling of our life — each and every day.

And it's not something to strive for as much as it is something to recognize as an already existing reality!

All things exist in God: period, end of sentence.

The branch is always connected to the vine.

But because we are mesmerized by the light bulbs of our own creation: fame, money and power; we live in the illusion of separation from God, and of separation from one another.

Our task, each and every day, is to see past the illusion, to reclaim our true nature, so that we can live each day with an eye clearly set on our true destiny.

That process is already at work in all of us.

As one of my very favorite monks, Fr. Richard Rohr, writes,

"The True Self -- where you and God are one -- does not **choose** to love as much as **IT IS** love itself already, which is exactly what St Paul tells us in his letter to the Colossians: "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

The True Self does not **teach us** compassion as much as **IT IS** compassion.

Loving from this core of your being is like a river flowing within you of its own accord, which is exactly what St John tells us:

"Whoever believes in me, as Scripture says, will find rivers of living water flow within them."

From this spacious and grounded place, it's easy to connect, empathize, forgive, and love .... everything.

We were made in love, for love, and to love.

This deep inner 'yes,' that is God in me, is already loving God through me.

The false self, our "infatuated with light bulbs self," doesn't know how to love, at least not deeply.

It is too self-centered, too small, to be compassionate." Rohr, paraphrased.

This holy night, as we celebrate God becoming the first truly human being, remember this: you are made in the image of God.

"And realize that if you could see with the eyes of the soul, you'd see angels marching before every person, announcing:

"Make way for the image of God!

Make way for the image of God!..... Long, Testimony, 46.

Even me, even you.....

This night, in all of our incompleteness, in all of our struggles, God says to every human person:

"You are accepted.

You are accepted by that which is greater than you, the name of which you do not know.

Don't ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later.

Don't try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much.

Don't seek for anything; don't intend anything.

Simply accept the fact that you are accepted." Tillich.

In this child, through the grace of God, all of humanity is home free.

The groaning of creation will one day find its new birth, "a magnificent, yet delicate project, worked out over the vast expanse of time, revealing, not the power of one who insists on cleaning up everyone's act, but the greater power of one who patiently and compassionately and gently loves us into being; this gracious God for whom time doesn't matter." James Allison. paraphrased.

So, no matter what that priest or parent or other person of influence may have told you long ago, God doesn't come to punish, or frighten, or scold.

Instead, God comes to tell us, all of us, even you, even me, that we are deeply, truly, and forever .... loved.

Merry Christmas....!

+amen