

Sermon

"The Light"

Pastor Lisa Giacomazza
Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church
December 17, 2023

Today, the third Sunday in Advent, we light the candle of joy. Joy – an emotion that is identified with the Christmas season and yet, so many of us struggle here because of the pain we feel through grief and loss. Some do not see this time as a time of beauty and light. Some come carrying burden and pain.

Our Gospel from John is a moment where John the Baptist is having a “back and forth” conversation with the Levites and Priests about who *he* is and who Jesus is. Here our Gospel...

John 1:6-8, 19-28

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” ²¹And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” ²²Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’” as the prophet Isaiah said. ²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, “Why then

are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" ²⁶John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Who are you? What do you say about yourself? A pointed question for John – one that he answers by telling them who he is not. And then as the world often does, they question why he baptizes – who gives him the authority.

When I read this scripture it emphasizes to me what is wrong with the human condition – we tend to ask the wrong question. Not because we do not deserve an answer but because there is no answer that we can understand. The question is not why did this happen? Why have I lost this person, this child, spouse, brother, sister, friend...the question is how...how can I carry on, how can I feel their love now, how do I "build up my ruins"...

Grief over someone we lost. Christmas tends to conjure up more discomfort in this regard because the traditions remind us who is no longer there or what we can no longer do. For me, I struggle with cookies – yes cookies. My mother was an exceptional baker and she made the most delicious cookies at Christmas – and so many of them. The neighborhood couldn't wait to get a tray of her cookies each year. When she passed, my sister, nieces and I have tried to carry on at least a part of this tradition but truthfully I will never be able to duplicate it. Because it wasn't about the cookies...it was her presence and her generosity that provided a light for me during the season – the waft that traveled

through the house for weeks at time – made me know she and my Dad were in the kitchen, baking.

Losing them was hard – I remember the pain on the day like it was yesterday. So Christmas doesn't look like that anymore for me...but you know what, I also remember the moment the light burned through the darkness and I realized that I could have Christmas without cookies – without her cookies. And yesterday, my daughter and I baked cookies and none of them were any that she had ever made – and it wasn't about the cookies. It was about she and I making a new memory. And the light shined through.

Grief can be a powerful thing – and we must walk through it in our own way. But in that process and through this season, let the light shine through.

Isaiah brings forth a promise from God that we have this within us always...

“61The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; 2to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; 3to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.”

I am going to pause in our service today to allow you to reflect upon the light of Christ and the healing that is at hand. I am going to play some healing music and I will walk around the sanctuary. If you would like a healing blessing – for us to pray together – stand or just sit taller and raise your hand and I will

pause with you. Now remember, the light is within you – the ember is burning – consider this a stoking of your own internal love from God. According to Isaiah – “you are a people whom the Lord has blessed”. Today you will leave knowing it.

Love is powerful – and even though we experience loss and deep deep sadness, our hearts are built to carry sadness and joy simultaneously. It is ok though you are grieved, to feel happiness and joy through this time. Today let’s release some of those burdens and experience fully whatever this coming week offers knowing it is ours to have.

(start music, dip your hand in the baptismal font and go to bless the people)