

# The Light Within

Psalm 147:12-28

John 1: 1-18

There was no better place to play flash light tag than on the farm. When the sun went down and the darkness settled over the land, the out of doors became one large hiding place. Sometimes you would hide behind a bush. Other times you would stand straight as an arrow behind the trunk of a tree. Sometimes we would lay flat on the slope of a ditch. Other times we would encircle the house, trying to stay one corner of the house ahead of the person with the flashlight.

The person with the flashlight was it. If he spotted you with the light you were out. But, if you were able to elude the light, while he chased around trying to find us, we had the chance of making it to the safe zone, where we could no longer be tagged. The darkness was our friend. The darkness was our ally. But, the game, of course, depended on the flashlight and the possibility of being spotted. The light needed the darkness and the darkness needed the light.

Flash light tag came to an end when a sales person came out to the farm and convinced my Grandfather about the dangers found in the dark and that we would all be a lot safer if we got one of those tall and very bright yard lights that were popping up on many of the farms in the area. The very bright yard light eliminated the darkness. No longer could we

hide behind a bush or the curvature of a hill because we would be spotted plain as day. There was too much light.

For a long time, this is precisely how I felt about the Jesus presented in the Gospel of John. “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.” You open the Gospel of John and right away Jesus comes across as one of those bright spot lights obliterating all the darkness.

All of the Gospels are written from the perspective of those who believe in the resurrection of Christ. Even though Jesus steadily moves toward the cross, the Gospels all know that in Jesus there exists a light that will never be put out. Yet, in writing their Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, reveal a Jesus whose light shines through his humanity.

John on the other hand, from the very beginning to the very end of his Gospel seems to presents us with a picture of Jesus in which the resurrected Christ shines as bright as the noon day sun and the humanity of Jesus seems to disappear into the shadows. It is John’s Jesus who has all those I am sayings, “I am the bread of life..I am the good shepherd....I am the true vine... I am the resurrection... I am the light of the world...” It is John’s Jesus who on the cross, never questions or doubts, or feels forsaken as does the Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel. It is John’s Jesus, who from the cross determines the time of his death, by saying simply, “it is finished”. You open the Gospel of John and you

almost feel as if you have to look away because the light is too bright. The light is too bright. There is no room for darkness.

It is this bright light Jesus that gets unfurled at football games, baseball games and other sporting events with a quote from John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but may have eternal life.” The implied corollary to this quote from John and the way in which it commonly is employed is with the extra emphasis, “if you don’t believe in this bright light Jesus, you will perish.”

It is this bright light Jesus that leaves no possibility for the light of Islam, the light of Buddhism, the light of Judaism, the light of Hinduism the light of Indigenous spiritual traditions or for that matter the light of secular humanists who continue insisting on the potential of human beings as over against the utter depravity of people who without the bright light of Jesus live in utter darkness.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that for John, the extremely bright light of Jesus leaves no room for other lights. What’s more this bright light has no need for darkness because darkness is the enemy of the light.

But, is this really what John is saying or have we simply given into the fear of those for whom fear itself is an ally in justifying hatred, justifying discrimination, justifying exploitation, and justifying violence. My grandfather opted to get the bright light that kept us from making

friends with the darkness. However, when it came to my Uncle Roy my grandfather found a place for the darkness and he continued believing that even without the bright light of Jesus dominating the landscape, there was still light present in my Uncle.

My uncle Roy had been in the Battle of the Bulge during World War II. Most of his platoon was killed. He was one of the only survivors. He had gone to war listing his occupation as a carpenter. After the war there was no place for a carpenter who had lost most of the fingers on his hand. Roy spent the next 40 years of his life as an alcoholic, surviving mostly on a small government pension. He lived alone in a trailer house in the country. If you stopped by to visit, you could barely get into his house because clothes and other items were piled everywhere. The sink was full of dried food encrusted pots and dishes. Today we would recognize my uncle as suffering from PTSD.

All my grandfather knew was that he loved his son and that he believed that God's light had not been eliminated by the darkness with which he struggled. My grandfather made room for the darkness, prayed for Uncle Roy every day of his life and he never quit loving his son.

John Philipp Newell, one of the best known interpreters of Celtic Christianity reminds us that the Gospel of John is a favorite Gospel among Celtic Christians precisely because they see the Risen Christ not as a darkness obliterating yard light, but rather as affirmation of the light

present in all of life. Newell states, “In every moment we can glimpse the Light that was in the beginning and from which all things have come....Everything originates in the light of God....This is what the story of the nativity of the Christ Child does. The sacredness of the Christ Child, born of the marriage between heaven and earth, reveals the sacredness of the universe, conceived by the union of spirit and matter...” “It is no coincidence,” says Newel, “that, in the thirteenth century, St. Francis, first introduced the tradition of the nativity scene. It brought into focus for him the Light that he saw in the earth and in every creature, the light of “Brother Sun” and “Sister Moon,” and as he called them in his Canticle of the Sun, ‘Sister Water’ and ‘Brother Fire’. We have a sibling relationship with everything that exists and that light that we glimpse in the trees, in the creatures, in the eyes of one another, is the Light that is also within us”.

My grandfather never saw my Uncle get sober. He died continuing to believe that light of God was still there in his son. A few years after my grandfather died, my uncle stopped drinking and he spent the later years of his life in community with the same folks that my grandfather had worshiped most of his life. The light remained with my uncle as it does with all of us, even in the most difficult of times.

There has been a great deal of harm done by Christians treating Jesus as the one and only light given to us by God to obliterate the darkness. In sharp contrast, John tells us the one who is close to the

heart of God has come to reconnect us to the light that shines in each of us and in all creation. Rather than a bright spot light treating darkness as an enemy, we have our own small flash light, powered by the renewing energy of God's love. With darkness as our companion and sometimes even our friend, we are called as individuals and as a community of faith to be a light for God's justice and God's love at work in our world.

**Psalm 147:12-28**

*In our first lesson, the Psalmist reminds us that we live out of a tradition that never approaches God's word as literal, but rather God's word is creative, lively, full of power and strength.*

Praise God, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! For God strengthens the bars of your gates; God blesses your children within you. God grants peace within your borders. God fills you with the finest of wheat. God sends out a command to the earth. God's word runs swiftly. God gives snow like wool; God scatters frost like ashes. God hurls down hail like crumbs - who can stand before God's cold? God sends out a word, and melts them; God makes his wind blow, and the waters flow. God declares the word to Jacob, and declares God's statutes and ordinances to Israel. God has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know God's ordinances. Praise be to God!

**John 1: 1-18**

*Neither the Gospel of Mark nor the Gospel of John includes any reference to the birth stories of Jesus. Using poetic language, John begins his Gospel with the prelude found in our text today. In the prelude John identifies Jesus with the same creative word spoken of by the Psalmist, which is also often associated with the Sophia of God or the wisdom of God. John goes on to insist that through this Word, this Sophia, we encounter the light of God's presence that is in all things.*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. 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. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.] He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'" From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.