



# **"Let in the Light"**

a sermon by

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I'd like to congratulate you all on making it through Lent. There is undoubtedly a bit of a liturgical sigh of relief when we remove the purple cloth from our pulpits and change it out for the Easter white - marking a season that celebrates the redemptive work of our Lord from Easter Sunday all the way until Pentecost in the beginning of June. I guess you can never celebrate God's redemptive work too much. In many ways Easter is about new beginnings as we look to the resurrection of our Lord and the life thereafter. So for today I'd like to read from the beginning of the gospel of John because it talks about the Word of God - that's Word with a capital 'W' - and its activity since the very beginning of time right through to today. The language is a bit tricky in John, but hang with me. Our reading comes to us from the gospel of John 1:1-18.

“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.” Here ends our reading. This is the Word of the Lord: Thanks be to God.

The Wednesday after Easter and we find ourselves in the company of the disciples peering into the empty tomb and wondering what is next. The shock of the Easter celebration is still in many ways ringing in our ears - if for no other reason than because the memory of countless children with sugar flowing through their veins on Sunday morning haunts us still. But the celebration lingers joyfully, gladly, blessedly in the atmosphere and, in my case at least, in the few extra pounds gained over the weekend. But we do stand at a juncture in our liturgical year and in our history when the question, “what is next” is as pressing as ever. We barely have time to recover from that “oh my gosh!” moment of the resurrection when we are asked to downshift once again to life as usual and realize that we are still in many ways lingering outside of that open grave. After the 40 days of Lent, we may feel that we have the slow progression to the grave down to a science. The posture of walking with Mary and the other women, carrying their spices to anoint the body of the crucified Jesus is now a comfortable one for us - as comfortable as it can be, at least.

John says that it was still dark when Mary arrived at the tomb. It would have taken a few

moments, I'd imagine, for her eyes to adjust to the fact that it was not a giant stone that now stood before her, but a gaping hole. And in that gaping black hole where she expected a corpse, there was nothing but the abrupt exclamation point that Jesus is risen. And as the sun slowly warmed the atmosphere of the graveyard and the haze on the ground began to glow, her mind began to fire away and so does ours. He had said "the light of the world" hadn't he? "I am the light - you are the light of the world"? Now the grave is empty and we're left staring at it. What does this all mean? What does come next?

We tend to think of the resurrection in terms of its effects on us personally only. Sure, Christ defeated the power of sin broadly, but what that means locally is that you and I are forgiven. Which is true, thanks be to God! But it can become so personalized in our minds that we forget that there is a larger context to this resurrection piece - much larger, in fact. A context that began before time but that drives our understanding of this empty tomb and our place at it today and that deserves unpacking if we are to truly understand what it means to worship the light of the world. That's where John comes in. Because he shares that before time was the Word - the capital 'W' Word - that was with God and was God and who created all things, humanity among them. And this Word according to John was 2 things to humanity - it was life and it was light. And though there was darkness in creation, the darkness of chaos and later the darkness of sin, the light shone in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.

But then John goes on to describe this Word a little further saying that in time he took on flesh and lived among us. The verb used here literally means he "pitched a tent" among us. And once he pitched a tent in the dark forest of our humanity, and because no one has ever seen God and this Word rests close to God's heart, he set out to make God known. Literally, "to exegete, to interpret God to the world." And while his own people did not accept him, and the very world he created did not know its own creator, to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God. It is pretty amazing if you stop to think about it, really. The very light that created the heavens and the earth is also the same light that called us into being and desired to make itself known to us so that we might share in the abundance of its life. It is the same light that became flesh and subjected itself to death as we know it so that we might be brought close to the heart of God. That same light not only emptied the tomb but saw fit to show it to us, and promised to help us find our path today and give us the power to walk along it. No wonder the darkness could not overcome it.

It took Mary's eyes a little time to adjust standing outside of the empty tomb. So too does it take our eyes some time to adjust to the fact that the resurrection is part of a much larger story of the ongoing interpretation of God to the world. And now in the Easter celebration as we rise to claim this light of the world as the source of our life and the object of our faith, we see that we receive not only a personal blessing from the resurrection, but a corporate charge. For when the light shines in the darkness to reveal the empty tomb, it reveals not only that our sins are forgiven, but also enlightens us to the fact that there is a world of darkness around us that still desperately needs the light of Christ. Standing before the tomb we are challenged to take seriously that as his creation and as his disciples we have a part to play in this larger story of the light of the world. For the promises of the life to come are only part of the equation of the good news that was and is Jesus Christ, God with us. The other part is that things on this earth are

supposed to look differently in light of the light of the world. Things like the pain of a neighbor in need or the deep hungers of physical and spiritual poverty in this city. The doubt and insecurities that plague us, and the thirst for power that holds our lives and our world captive. These things should look differently to us because in the resurrection our eyes have been illumined to the possibilities in Christ and the torch has been passed to us to acquaint the world with the ways of God. A great Rabbi once prayed to his Lord, "I do not want your paradise, I do not want your coming world, I want you and you only." The bold claim that we make on Easter is that Christ has given us the power to be God's children and has called us to share with our brother Jesus in the family business of grace and truth and light to the world. In short, to share not only the promises of the kingdom to come, but God himself. Because while the tomb now stands empty, by the power of the Holy Spirit Jesus is still very much alive and well and walking the earth - in each one of us, the body of Christ, the light of the world.

One of your fellow Wednesday worshippers told me last year after Easter that she had grown up in a small country church with an old sanctuary that still had functioning shutters on its windows. On Easter morning the congregation would file excitedly into the Sanctuary for worship only to find the room dark and gloomy. The shutters were sealed tightly with hardly a ray of light passing through, so that the room took on an almost eerie atmosphere. Out of the darkness the pastor would shout, "The Lord is risen" and the people would respond, "He is risen indeed!" and the back shutters on either side of the room were opened. Again, "The Lord is risen!" "He is risen indeed!" Another set was opened. Again and again, "The Lord is risen - he is risen indeed!" Until finally each shutter was thrown back and the room was bathed in beautiful light.

Let us lay down the spices that we have sorrowfully and carefully prepared to anoint the death of God and instead roll away the stone to reveal the power of eyes illumined. Let us throw open the tightly sealed windows of this world and let in the light. For Christ is alive and we have seen his glory, full of grace and truth. And he has given us not only the invitation to be his children, but the power. The power to be, with the help of the Holy Spirit, God's continuing revelation of himself to the world. The power to remind the darkness that it will never overcome. The power to walk straight into those graveyards that look like they have only death and suffering and defeat to offer and to shine the light of Christ - transforming them into means by which God will share his love with the world. Our Easter celebration is that Christ has brought us close to the Father's heart. That celebration continues when we make his heart known to all. Amen.