

Isaiah 9
The Kind light of God.
Christmas Eve 2019
Rev. Sharon Smith

There is a temptation to understand God's light as a florescent operating table kind of light. That shows up every detail and exposes each wound with great precision.

Or a bright interrogation scene kind of light – where the Mafia have you seated, their faces only silhouettes and demand you tell all your shameful secrets.

Or a camera's flashlight that exposes every freckle or pimple or wrinkle, much to our chagrin.

Or a security movement light on your third date when you finally get the courage to lean in for that kiss!

I wonder what it would be like to take ourselves back to the time before human beings created artificial light. And to sit with the shepherds in the darkness, keeping watch.

With 14 full hours of darkness available to them, nearly half of this time is quiet rest and not sleep. This rest state provided a necessary channel between dream and waking life. To rest in the dark and to listen.

Barbara Brown Taylor, Learning to Walk in the Dark

Resting with darkness and natural light not the exposing kind of light, with the gentle light of stars and moon and comets. Here there are no dichotomies - No opposites, but coexisting realities. There is darkness warmed by soft light.

Friends, what if God, was a kind, gentle, moonlight, starlight kind of God?

And not the Mafia, Santa Clause God who seeks to expose our behaviour – seeing if we are naughty or nice – rewarding us or punishing us.

What if we understood God as loving kindness, (in Hebrew – Hesed), and what if we could rest, knowing 'God with us', without fear?

Tonight, we heard the reading of two poems.

One written in 8th Century BC attributed to Isaiah in the Hebrew portion of the Bible. A poem written in a time when Israel was experiencing frequent attacks, just prior to the Babylonian Exile during the reigns of King Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.

The poet longs for peace –

- Visualizing a promise in the form of a child... a prince of peace.
- A light that would consume the trappings of war

The second poem, written last century, published in 1947, by Thomas Merton, A Trappist Monk. He sat in the aftermath of World War II and wondered about the meaning of Christmas.

- Coexistent with the typical Christmas Card peaceful Manger scene there are images of pain, suffering, rapiers/swords, and holocaust. The complexity of our hateful time.
- And in it there is a longing for light.

But if light is not the exposing kind of light – to call behaviour into check?
Why light, what's the point?

Perhaps we catch a glimpse in the actions of those Shepherds, the ones who kept watch at night in the gentle light of God, and who now shake off the snow from their feet and hats, and kneel before the Christ child to witness their own lives.

For violence is what happens when we don't know what else to do with our own suffering. Show me a person who makes others suffer and I'll show you someone who's "working out" his or her suffering.

But in a gentle kind welcoming place, suffering can break the heart open to compassion instead of breaking it down into cruelty.

Surrounded by God's kind light, we too slowly heal, and we become light-bearers in a world of too much darkness and death.

Parker Palmer, Embracing the shadow and the light

When we can become fully present to ourselves in this moment.

Kind light insists on incarnation.

The gifts that each one of us are, become more fully visible in and for our world.

So friends when your vision has gone....

Its time to go into the night... to rest with the gentle, kind, starlight that is God with us.

There you can be sure, you are not beyond love.

Adapted from a poem by David Whyte.

Amen