

“Walking in the Light”

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Isaiah 5:18-24; John 1:1-5

They are solid. She is a dynamo. He’s a rock. I’m feeling up. She is feeling down. What light through yonder window breaks? It is the east and Cindy is the sun. I know it was originally Juliet, but Cindy works better for me. Metaphors, these are all metaphors that we use all the time. You might even call us “metaphorians.” I say that because studies have shown that we use metaphors between 20 and 25 times an hour. What is a metaphor? It is attaching the attributes of one object to another object to which you cannot literally apply it. In other words, when say someone is a rock, we know they are not a literal rock, but we understand what the metaphor implies about that person. We take those attributes of a rock and apply them to another person. Metaphors enrich our language and our understanding of the world around us. So why this morning, the day after Christmas, are we talking about metaphors? We are doing so because without understanding metaphors we cannot understand the Bible in general, and the opening of the Gospel of John in particular.

To understand this opening of the Gospel of John, this critical piece of our faith, we need to examine four metaphors, three of which are in this passage and one of which is not. We will begin with the metaphor that is not here and that is the metaphor of the way. The “way” is used throughout the scriptures, from the beginning to the end, from the journeys of Abraham, to the Book of Acts where the church is called “the Way.” It is used to describe the reality that the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the Prophets, Jesus, and Paul has laid out before us as a way of life; a manner of living that will lead us to life in all its fullness. Think about the way as our life’s journeys, including the choices and decisions we make. That “way” is supposed to be informed by the second metaphor we will take up, which is the life, or as we read, “What has come into the world was life, and the life was the light of all people.”

Life within Judaism meant more than simply breathing in and out. It meant life in all its richness and abundance. It meant a life of abundance, and grace, and sharing; a life without violence; a life of loving God and neighbor. Take a second and imagine what your ideal life would look like. Chances are it is filled with peace, fellowship, abundance, friendship, and community. These words are all richly wrapped up in the metaphor of the life as it is used throughout the scriptures. So those two metaphors, the way and life, show us what God desires for us, for all human beings. God desires that we all have that rich abundant life and the manner in which we are to find it is to follow in the way. But the question has always been, whether it is

in the Hebrew/Jewish community or within the Christian community, how do we find our way to that life? The reason we ask that is that so often we live in darkness, which is the next metaphor.

Darkness in the scriptures is the inability to see the way that leads to the life. Let's take a moment to dig into this metaphor of the darkness. Have you ever been somewhere that is really, really dark? It may be your bedroom at night, or a closet with the light off, or a night in which there is no moonlight or starlight. The danger of the dark is that we can lose our way, we can wander off the path, we can find ourselves in a ditch, or falling off a cliff, or in the presence of animals that may harm us. The dark is the place in which people can secretly meet and plan and scheme. The dark is the place in which, if we live in it, we will lose our way. We will wander off the path. We will not find the life that God wants us to possess. The trouble is that the world is filled with darkness and with those who whisper to us that we should leave the way of God in Christ. The struggle for the community of faith has always been that if we want to attain this abundant life by walking in God's path, how do we be sure that we are staying on the way? The answer is that we look for a light that will illumine our path.

Within the Jewish community the light that illumines the way of God that leads to abundant life is the Torah. The Psalmist says that Torah is a "lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path." What Judaism understood was that if people wanted to find life, they needed to be obedient to the Law of Moses including rules such as love God and neighbor, care for the widow and the orphan, don't glean to the edge of your fields, make sure that the poor get fed, and help your neighbor in need. All of these good things, if we follow them, are the light, the lamp that dispels the darkness and illumines the way to life. But something happens in the Gospel of John that moves beyond the Torah as light; and that is the light is Jesus, the Word made flesh. And this is a light that cannot be overcome by darkness. It is a light that cannot be extinguished. Jesus is the light, the lantern, that helps us see the way, the path, and find the life. And Jesus is the light because he was the one who was in the beginning with God creating all things. Think about the imagery of creation in which there was chaos, a void, and the Word of God spoke and there was order, there was light. What John does is take that metaphor and say that Jesus is the creative and still creating light, which is why darkness cannot overcome it. John tells us that together Jesus and God created all that there is, and so there is no power that can overcome them. So, that if we are willing to follow that light we will stay on the path and find the life that God offers; a life filled with richness, abundance, peace, hope, and love.

The challenge for all of us then is to take following Jesus seriously. I mean this in a very, particular way, that we don't just believe in Jesus, that Jesus is a particular something, or someone, but it is allowing Jesus, through his life and teachings to be our light, and our guide. It is about imitating Jesus in all that we say and do. And if you want to know more about how to do this, join us on our next sermon series which is about this journey on the path, illuminated by the light, so that we find the life God desires for us. My challenge to you for this week, and for the new year is this: ask yourselves, how am I consciously trying to imitate and follow Jesus, that I might walk in the light along the path, and find God's abundant life?