

God is Light, and Light is Life

For the past five weeks of Lent, you have heard about the series of events Jesus set in motion that would change our world. In three years of teaching, miracles, and sometimes challenging established religious authority, Jesus had become well known. He was beloved by many; but he was also misunderstood, hated and feared by some. We are in our final week and a half of commemorating this season which changed the world. Holy week was a week of elements poured out for us - God's love poured out for us. During the past five weeks, we have encountered the elements of Blood, Oil, Wine, Water, and Tears. Tonight, I represent the character of Salome and I bring you the element of Light.

Our scripture reading for tonight is from Luke 24: 1-8:

Very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, carrying the spices that they had prepared. When they found the stone rolled away from the entrance, they went in. But they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus, and they did not know what to think.

Suddenly two men in shining white clothes stood beside them. The women were afraid and bowed to the ground. But the men said, "Why are you looking in the place of the dead for someone who is alive? Jesus isn't here! He has been raised from death. Remember that while he was still in Galilee, he told you, 'The Son of Man will be handed over to sinners who will nail him to a cross. But three days later he will rise to life.' Then they remembered what Jesus had said.

Salome was one of "the women" in this portion of scripture who went to the tomb to put spices on Jesus' body.

Let me tell you a little about Salome. Salome was the mother of two of Jesus' disciples: James and John. Her husband was Zebedee, a fisherman. Salome is a Hebrew name which means "peaceful, calm." I'm not certain that she always lived up to her name. In today's terms, we'd call Salome a "helicopter" mother, for she followed her sons closely, no doubt monitoring their position with Jesus. John and James were part of Jesus' inner circle. Along with Simon Peter, they alone of the twelve disciples, were with Jesus when He raised Jarius' daughter from the dead (Luke 8:51). This inner circle also witnessed Jesus' transfiguration and the appearance of Moses and Elijah. (Matt. 17:1-13) It probably wasn't surprising that Salome made a request of Jesus. Matthew 20:20-22 records:

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down asked a favor of him.

"What is it you want?" he asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them.

"Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

"We can," they answered.

Salome may have begun to follow Jesus to keep an eye on her boys, but we know Salome was a believer. She stood with Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the mother of James the younger and Joses, at a distance from the cross, when Jesus was crucified. (Mark 15:40,41) With the two Marys, Salome went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body with spices. They saw that the large stone had been rolled away and they were the first of Jesus' faithful followers to hear the angel's words: "He is not here. He has risen!"

Salome, along with her inner circle sons James and John, had seen and believed in the Light of this world.

Tonight, I bring you the element of Light.

In the third verse of the first chapter of Genesis, we read, "And God said, Let there be light; and there was light."

Light was the first recorded command given by God. On the 4th day, God created the sun, moon, and stars. The moon and stars give light and guidance. The energy of the sun gives us life. Our eyes are made in such a way that we need light to see. Without light, there would be no sight. Without light, there would be no photosynthesis: plants could not make food and they would die. Animals, including us, would perish without plants to eat. The earth would again be dark and cold. Light is life, physical...and spiritual.

Light is synonymous with truth, understanding, goodness, righteousness -- in other words, with Jesus.

The absence of light, darkness, is a metaphor for satan, evil, ignorance, sin, deception. Job was a man of God who told us: "There are those who rebel against the light, who are not acquainted with its ways, and do not stay in its paths. The murderer rises before it is light, that he may kill the poor and needy, and in the night he is like a thief. The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight, saying, 'No eye will see me;' and he veils his face. In the dark they dig through houses; by day they shut themselves up; they do not know the light. For deep darkness is morning to all of them; for they are friends with the terrors of deep darkness." Job 24, verses 13-17.

But darkness cannot stand before truth, before the Light. Light illuminates and reveals; nothing can be hidden from the light.

Like Marvia last week, I used the internet to research my element, light. When we teach students how to write a research paper, we warn about using the internet. Findings will be mixed. My quick entry on light brought up Texas Interfaith Power and Light, supposedly an interfaith environmental group. The lighthearted topic was religions, and how many people it takes to change a light bulb. For example:

"How many Episcopalians does it take to change a light bulb?"
"Ten. One to actually change the bulb and nine to say how much they miss the old one."

We Methodists were NOT overlooked. "How many Methodists does it take to change a light bulb?"

"Undetermined. Whether your light is bright, dull, or completely out, you are loved! You can be a light bulb, turnip bulb, or tulip bulb. Church wide lighting service is planned for this Sunday. Bring bulb of your choice and a covered dish."

"How many Atheists does it take to change a light bulb?"
"One. But they are still in darkness."

Isaiah prophesied, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.... For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, the everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:2,6)

John, Jesus' beloved disciple and the son of Salome, wrote of Jesus: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." In Chapter 1 of John, "Light" is repeated seven times in five verses! (John 1:4,5,7,8,9)

The Light, the illuminator of darkness, came into the world that we might spiritually see and be saved.

In John 8:12, we read: "Then spoke Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

We live in a world of sin, of violent deaths, of strong enemies of our souls.

David was the shepherd boy who became God's anointed king. During his life, David faced the harsh possibility of death at the hands of his enemies, at the hands of his own king, at even at the hand of his own flesh and blood. We need to have the words of David in our minds and hearts: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1)

Satan had a plan to put out the Light. When Jesus' took his last breath on that cross, Satan thought he had won. Satan didn't see Sunday morning coming; he didn't anticipate Jesus' resurrection and victory over Death.

When we accept Jesus' free gift of salvation and follow him, we become a reflection of his light and bear the responsibility of carrying the light to those still in darkness.

Remember the Atheists -- and so many others, some we don't know, some we do: neighbors, friends, family. Even with a new light bulb shining, they are still in darkness. We are told God is not willing that any should perish. Just as He loves us, he loves those not yet walking in His Light.

Remember the song we sang as children: "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. This little light of mine, I'm gonna to let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine. Hide it under a bushel? NO! I'm gonna let it shine."

Jesus told his disciples, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it gives light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:14,15,16)

Amen.