

Light Reflected

Isaiah 9:1-4

Matthew 4:12-17

Until fairly recent times, the night was viewed with great fear. Why? The absence of light! Without light the night made it impossible to see where to set a foot or place a hand. Without light night made it impossible to see who or what might be “out there” in the darkness ahead. “Early to bed and early to rise...,” that old wisdom, was well adhered to because the night was perilous and fraught with danger.

Nowadays we are surrounded by artificial light. It is difficult for us to appreciate the way night was perceived in earlier times. For thousands of years, people illuminated their dwellings with fire. It was not until William Murdock invented the gaslight in 1803 that large areas could be lit up after dark. For all time before that, people walked in darkness-literally.

In the days in which the Bible was written, people knew the meaning of darkness. Thus, when the Biblical writers proclaimed that, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light”, as in our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah this morning, they were speaking of something vivid, dramatic, and hope-filled. When Matthew speaks of Jesus, as in this morning’s Gospel lesson, as the light who fulfills that prophecy, he means that Jesus will transform the world from one of darkness and despair to one of hope and joy. Only when we understand the darkness of that world, can we begin to appreciate the words of the Psalmist: “The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?” Or the words of John: “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”

Perhaps if we lived in Barrow, Alaska, we could get a real feel for darkness. Barrow, on the Arctic Ocean, is the northernmost inhabited point in North America. In winter, it is also the darkest. The sun set there this past November, and it won't be seen again until the end of this month. Getting through over two months of night isn't easy. In fact this tiny nondescript outpost—home to 3,000 hardy hunters, trappers, and public employees, has one of the highest attempted suicide rates in America.

The people of Barrow understand the significance of light. Next week, when the first feeble rays of sunlight peep back over the horizon, some Barrovians will take to the ice to fly brightly colored kites, catching those rays in a jubilant celebration. The darkness has been dispelled! Light has come!

It isn't easy to live in physical darkness, without light. It isn't any easier to live in spiritual darkness, without Christ, the Light of the World. Jesus brings the light of hope into life. Without him, life itself sets in darkness. Jesus brings light into the world of the human soul. He does this by letting us see God for just who God really is. Jesus, by his own life illuminates the true nature of God.

An officer in the National Council of Churches was invited to help lead worship in a service to be televised from Israel some years ago. The service was beamed from a very old church under the care of a community of monks. The church was quite ancient, and it had never been modernized with electrical power.

As the officer from the Council looked around, a fascinating scene played out before her. The television crew was busy going about its work of setting up generators, stringing cables, mounting cameras to stands, placing microphones. Hushed and standing

back against the walls, were the monks. They seemed like time travelers from another century, rather than current residents.

Then something extraordinary happened as the scene played on. The technicians began to test the lights. The whole darkened chapel suddenly flamed to light for the first time ever in its ancient existence. Some of the monks looking up, nudged their brothers. Soon they were all pointing upward. The monks then vanished. Presently they scurried back bringing the entire community to see what they had seen.

On the ceiling was a huge mural of exquisite beauty. A member of their order, in a forgotten century long ago, had erected a scaffold, and there high above the small sanctuary he had quietly painted by candlelight a masterpiece unseen to any but God alone. Only now, hundreds of years after, perhaps a thousand, was it being discovered. The light of the television cameras had brought this ancient masterpiece into full view.

Light has the power to bring into full view that which has been hidden. Jesus has done that to our knowledge of God. How shall we really know God? We can know him fully only as he has revealed himself to us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. What is God like? He is like Jesus: loving, compassionate, merciful, and forgiving. Without Christ, we would be left trying to see God through the darkness: an austere taskmaster, instead of a God of forgiving grace; a god who demands sacrifice from us, instead of the God who sacrifices himself for us; a god removed from us, instead of the God who seeks an intimate relationship with each of us; a god understood as capricious, distant, an indifferent tyrant, instead of the merciful and loving one we can know as father and mother. That is the great light that Christ shines in this world so set in darkness. Because of him we know God as God

really is. Because of him we walk in the light of life. Christ is the light of the World. He is the source of the light that enlightens you and me.

But, this is not where it all ends. You see, this light that shines upon us and illuminates our true relationship with God, also changes us. Just a few verses further into our Gospel lesson, Jesus turns this whole business of being light onto you and me. He says to us, "You are the light of the world." You and I in receiving the light, become light. Now, Jesus is the source, but once that light illumines us, we become his enlightened reflectors. Much as a light house's source light is magnified by its many reflectors, so we are given the wondrous task of being the search light of God's compassion and concern for the world. We focus that light that moves out into the darkness to find and guide those who have yet to see God's light, yet to experience his love, yet to feel his favor, yet to know him as friend and savior.

How are we to reflect this light? We do it together, of course. When we come together as a body, we have the ability to pool our light reflecting resources in big ways, such as our physical and financial support of various outreach efforts, missions and agencies, here in town and at a distance, that do God's work directly with those in need.

But our calling to be light goes beyond the group effort. We are each of us to reflect the light implanted within us individually as well. We do that wherever and with whomever we are. Being light is expressed this way in our daily lives through our many relationships with others.

For instance, consider our families. This is where many of us will make our greatest contribution for Christ in life. How available are

we to these closest to us? How involved, I mean really attentively and compassionately and sacrificially focused, are we on them when we are home or in their homes. After a hard day it really can be a sacrifice to be attentive and compassionate; especially when we need some of that focus on us, or we simply need some time off to be unfocused for a bit. This is the place, more than any other that tests our true reflective abilities.

Then consider the workplace. Most of us are probably already supportive of the boss. I mean, that's the job; but ungrudgingly? We probably get on fairly well with our colleagues. Yet, could there be one or two who really need the grace of our collegiality more than the others who are easier to relate to? What about our subordinates? Do they see Christ in us as we guide and direct them? That area might use some careful focus of light.

There are a lot of other areas too. For instance, and I just recently mentioned this one: when we're driving and we have to get somewhere quickly, and traffic just isn't cooperating; can the other drivers see grace in our actions? Or when we're shopping, do the shop-clerk and cashier see Christ's love in our attitude toward them? And, how's that Kringling going?

These are just some examples. Our job as Christians is to reflect Christ's light into every area of life. As the old Gospel tune put it, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna' let it shine."

Christ is the light of the world. He has made God known. By his light we are now called to be his reflected light, so that those who walk in darkness will see light. Reflect his light for all to see. May darkness become light wherever you walk.