

MESSAGE for Dec 11, 2011

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Light in our Darkness

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P.D. Eastman wrote a classic children's book, *Are You My Mother?* It's a story of a little bird that hatches and falls out of the nest while its mother is out getting food. The little bird wanders the countryside, looking for its mother. It meets all kinds of characters – a kitten, a dog, a cow, an old car, and finally a big mechanical shovel.

Every time the little bird meets one of these characters, it asks the same question: "Are you my mother?" And, every time, the characters respond, "No, silly, I am not your mother!"

Finally, the big mechanical shovel, which the little bird calls a "Snort," lifts the little bird back up into the nest, where it's reunited with its mother. It's a weird story about identity and searching for a connection to the one who gives life. I've read that story to my children so many times that I can easily miss the message it offers.

Today's story from John's Gospel is a bit weird too. And it too is a story about identity and searching for a connection to the one who gives life. We may have read this story so many times that we can easily miss the message it offers.

John is baptizing and proclaiming that the Messiah has come as the light of the world, and like the little bird in the children's story, the religious folks want to know who John is. They ask him questions over and over: "Are you the Messiah?" "Are you Elijah?" "Are you the prophet?" "Are you my mother? Can you hear them? Who *are* you, John? We are looking for the Christ; are you the one?"

John responds like the characters in the children's story. "No, silly I am not the Christ." John goes on to say, "I am not even worthy to untie the thong of his sandal."

John uses the image of light, saying that he is not the light but he reflects the light of Christ by what he says and what does. And those who are baptized also reflect the light of Christ by what they say and what they do, through repentance and forgiveness. They changed the world by living changed lives.

This time of year, many of us are looking for the perfect gift for that special someone. It's Advent. It's time to get ready for Christmas. My children will say, "Dad 18 more days till Christmas..." "17 more day's till Christmas..." "16 more days till Christmas..." They know it will soon be party time.

And yet, I wonder if we have somehow forgotten who the party is for? Anytime I go to a birthday party there's always a time of gift-giving. And yet, I wonder if it's Jesus' birthday party then why do we get all the gifts?

I wonder what gift we might consider giving to Jesus this year?

I love this time of year. I love the buzz that's in the air. I love the lights and the displays that people put in their yards and on their houses. I love the Christmas season. Don't you?

What I don't like is hustle and bustle. Somehow the Christmas message seems to get distorted especially with the stores saying "buy, buy, buy..." with all kinds of bargains and special deals on things we are told that "we just can't live without." Christmas seems to have become something that it wasn't intended to be.

I'll say it again, I love this time of year. I love getting gifts and I love giving gifts but I wonder if we might just be like that little bird looking for that special someone in all the wrong places.

Did you hear about the little boy standing in line at the mall to see Santa? He looked at all the people standing there then turning to his mother he said, "Mom, Christmas is the celebration of Jesus' birthday, right?" "Yes, it is!" His mother replied. He then asked her. "Where is the line to see Jesus?"

We can so easily get caught up in the hustle and bustle of this season that it destroys our joy and happiness. So let me ask you, have you ever stopped to look around and ask: Why am I doing this? Why am I standing in this line? Why am I buying this gift or going to that party or meeting this obligation. Why, why, why?

It can get pretty crazy this time of year and it can make you go crazy too! What's supposed to be a season of happiness (happy holidays!) and merriment (merry Christmas!) can end up being a season of exhaustion and frustration and depression. Instead of a season of light and happiness for many people it becomes a very dark time of year. How might we change that?

When John was asked, "Are you the one?" He said, "No, silly, I am not the Christ." Then he pointed to Jesus. He pointed to the light of the world.

How might we point others to Jesus? How might we give him the greatest gift we can? It's his birthday. He deserves the gifts.

Here is a Christmas riddle for you – *what gift can you give Jesus this year that won't cost you anything but will cost you everything?* Yourself. That's right! Give yourself to Jesus. Let him guide your life; your every thought, word, and deed this year. Let him live through you.

The message we hear from John is this. The light has come into the world for you and for me to free us from sin, death, and the devil empowering us to live by the light of God's grace and love everyday.

How might we share the light of Christ with others to make this world a brighter place?

An article in Newsweek titled “The Fall of the Dinosaurs” a few years ago explored the downfall of corporate giants like General Motors, IBM, and Sears. The first paragraph included this sentence: “*The institutions of family, church and government have long since lost their luster.*” If that’s true then no wonder the world is a dark place.

On February 4, 1993, Russian officials at the Flight Control Center near Moscow announced the successful deployment of a space reflector. This aluminum-covered disc was used by cosmonauts at the space station Mir to reflect light from the sun to the dark side of earth. With a twenty-five-foot disc in space, they were able to produce a two-mile circle of light on the earth. Russia is leading the way for reflective technology.

If the church has lost its luster, maybe it’s because we are trying to produce light rather than reflect The Light. So, how might we become better reflectors of the Son, S-O-N? How might we lead the way for a reflective theology of God’s grace and love shining out to the world from right here in Myerstown?

I have two suggestions:

First – we all need to admit that we are not the Son. We are not the Christ. It’s silly for us to think or act otherwise. Not one of us died on the cross. And yet, many of us make it about us. It’s not about us. It’s about Jesus and what he has done for us on the cross. And that changes everything.

Second – we need to admit that we are his servants called to point others to Jesus as the Savior of the world. We are not worthy to untie the thong on his sandal.

We are servants who stand in line in this place to meet him in the bread and the wine to receive the gift of life he offers. He then sends us out to reflect his light of love in the world. Jesus is the light in our darkness. He is the gift we can’t live without. We can either hide the light of Christ in our lives or reflect it. The choice is yours. Amen.