

Follow Jesus, the Light of the World!

Vacation Bible School Sunday

Isaiah 9:2, 6 & John 1:1-5, 8:12

June 19, 2016 ~ Rev. Jo Ramsey

Just a few hours ago, our world sat in darkness. It's hard to imagine now that the sun has risen and light fills our world. But maybe you remember... Maybe you were up last night to take out the dog or use the restroom yourself. Perhaps you had to change a diaper or comfort a restless child. Maybe you found yourself awakened by pain or worry. If so, I imagine you might agree that things seem different at night. Darkness has a way of magnifying things. At night, the universe expands, and often, so do our fears.

Can I see a show of hands... Who here is afraid of the dark? Who leaves a light on in the hallway? Who has a nightlight? When I asked the Confirmation Class, every single youth agreed, they were afraid of the dark.

Almost all of us know that feeling... darkness so dark you can't see a foot ahead, disorienting, unsettling, scary dark. When you're in it... it seems to stretch on forever. It's like the sun will never rise.

Being afraid of the dark is a nearly universal fear. They say it's not the darkness itself we fear, but what the darkness conceals from us. As much as we try, when it's dark, it's hard not to wonder what or who is lurking in the basement, or under the bed, or outside the window. We don't like not being able to see what is there, perhaps right in front of us, but unseen.

Of course, many of us also love nighttime. We like sitting outside after sunset, under the stars, listening to frogs and crickets, catching fireflies and watching the campfire. For us, darkness can be soothing. It softens the edges, tones down the colors, cools the skin. This darkness brings quiet, rest and rebirth.

Of course, most young people and city dwellers love nighttime too -- for its twinkling skyline and upbeat dance clubs, and the hum of a place that never sleeps. In college, we didn't even leave to go out until like 9 or 10 p.m. -- Now, I'm like, where's my pjs?!

Our scriptures this morning all concern darkness. The people of the Bible were intimately familiar with darkness. For them, it was as real and compelling as hunger. They had no light switches. No glowing screens. No headlights or flashlights or nightlights. No power at all. In fact, think about their two sources of light---The sun and fire. That's it! (Maybe we can count the moon and stars although they actually just reflect light.) They didn't have what we call light pollution. Darkness was a significant, powerful reality... a big deal... and so was light.

For our ancestors in the faith, light and dark became a perfect metaphor for our human experience, the very essence of God and the relationship between us. They understood that we live in a world fraught with hopelessness, fear, anxiety, and grief. At times we feel lost and alone, separated from God by sin and shame. We walk in darkness.

These words still resonate with us both practically and figuratively. We also walk in darkness. We only need to turn on the news to see it -- hatred, violence and greed. And, the list goes on...

How about closer to home? What's your darkness? Maybe it's the darkness of depression, or the gloom of grief and loss. Perhaps you are in the pit of addiction or the shadows of shame or abuse. Maybe you dwell in a twilight of constant fear---fear of

failing, of being abandoned, of running out of money, or getting sick, of being hurt.

Maybe your darkness isn't so big, but all of us have dark places. Sometimes we put our heads down, and just try to run through them. Sometimes we just wander around in a daze, hoping not to fall or get hurt. And sometimes we just stop and get stuck there.

But just as we wait for dawn, we believers must look forward with hope, trusting that God will break over the horizon, and flood our hearts with His light. God's light comes to us in the Word, and in the Word made flesh, that is Jesus. God's light is love. It illuminates our path and guides us through the darkness. It will not be overcome.

This is the good news that we want to share! So tomorrow night, we begin an epic journey into a mysterious, dark place. We'll go on a spelunking adventure called Cave Quest at our Vacation Bible School. We'll explore caves filled with sparkly gems, shimmery turquoise pools, dripping stalactites and cavernous underground rooms. But, we'll also imagine how caves might be cold and clammy, filled with unfamiliar creatures, and confusing tunnels.

Thanks to the Blackwell family, the kids will literally climb through a giant dark and winding maze. They'll learn how to step out of the boat, like Dave Cook sings, and walk on water (ok, cornstarch). They'll munch on bats made of pudding and Oreos designed by Phyllis Passarella and make sun catchers for our shut-ins as planned by Robin Tarbi and Joey Resciniti.

Even as we consider how life can be like a cave quest, we'll learn that Jesus is the light of the world. He gives us hope, courage, direction, love and power to face the darkness all around. All we need to do is follow him, and he will guide us through life's twists and turns.

I want to leave you with an image for your prayer time this week...There is a manmade cave in Ireland called Newgrange. Built more than 5000 years ago, this giant cave contains one long passage and three chambers. Its entrance is a giant crescent moon made of white stones, and inside, it's very dark.

One day in 1967, a professor happened to be there on the Winter Solstice, the darkest, shortest day of the year. As the sun rose, the single, long passage was flooded with light, illuminating all the way into the center, right into the deepest, darkest part of the cave. It turns out, the whole cave was designed and built for this one day – On the darkest, most bleak day of the year it reminds us that God's light shines in our darkness, right when we need it most!

Here's the thing...whether you go to Bible School or not, darkness will come. And in the middle of it, the future will look bleak. The temptation to quit will be huge. You will argue with yourself that there is no way forward. But, don't quit. You are in good company. We've all been there.

Remember, with God, nothing is impossible. He has more ropes and ladders and tunnels out of pits than you can imagine. Sit tight. Be of good courage. Pray without ceasing. Hold onto hope. This present darkness is really nothing...for darkness is just the absence of light. So, let God fill you. For when we are at our darkest hour, facing the unknown, lost, afraid, the light will shine in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it. Together, let's follow Jesus, the Light of the World!

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.