

A LIGHT TO LIGHTEN OUR DARKNESS

Christmas Day Year B

Is. 52:7-10; Ps. 98; Heb. 1:1-4, (5-12); Jn. 1:1-14

Gladstone 25/12/2020

Once upon a time, we are told, there was a man and there was a woman. We know that it was once upon a time and it was long, long ago, because it was a time very much unlike our own, a time like no other time since, a time we can only catch, and then only in small glimpses, in the hopeful dreams of youth. It was a time of beginnings – a fresh start – a time when the whole creation had the smell of newness to it. Before the first breeze stirred up the first dust to dim the glossy green leaves of the first tree; before the first leaf had ever withered and died and fallen to the forest floor; before the first tear drop had ever fallen, before the first sigh was ever uttered.

Have you ever dreamt about "once-upon-a-time?" Have you ever longed for a fresh start, a new beginning, a clean slate? The chance to begin again, without a history to hinder you, without the mistakes of the past to haunt you, without the burden of a sin-filled world constantly weighing on you, destroying every good thing you have hoped to do, destroying every hope, every dream; without having to tremble before the uncertainty of the future?

Once upon a time, so the story goes, there was a man and there was a woman, living in the new beginning - two people, completely and truly made for one another as none have ever been since that time, living in the depths of a love the likes of which we can only guess. For, you see, that depth of love – love without fear, loved lived in the presence of an eternal promise, loved lived in perfect innocence – that kind of love is no longer possible for us. It remains only as a dream, a long-ago memory of a love that once existed.

What happened, they say, is history – although why is harder to explain. They say that the eyes of the man and woman, created for light, were unable to deal with the darkness when it first came. And so they stumbled and fell. And that was the end of the new beginning. And ever since, men and women have been stumbling and falling in the darkness. They have been dying there, unable to see in the dark, unable to find a way out, unable to find their way back to the new beginning and to the light. Most who have gotten lost there have lost hope of returning to the day. That, so our scriptures tell us, is

our story. We have become lost, we grope in the darkness, unable to reach the light. Because it is our story, we know that it is true.

Yet that is not the end of the story—in truth, it's only half of the story. In the beginning there was a man and a woman, but there was also a light—a clear, strong, burning flame in which there was no impurity, which lived in the presence of the man and the woman. They were created with eyes for the day so that they could live in the presence of that light.

What happened between the man and the woman and the clear, strong light has not always been clear to us. When we left the light and stumbled into the darkness, some claimed that the light ceased to shine. Some said it was never there at all, that it existed only in our dreams. But the truth is that when the man and the woman left it, the light remained. Not only remained, but pursued them, even into the realms of darkness, to bring them back.

And one dark night, in a tired little town called Bethlehem, it found them. It settled over a stable, shining its clear, bright light over the place where we stumbled and fell. Like a spark, it ignited a donkey's stall, and settled in a manger. With that, again, came the possibility of a new beginning.

The poet, Richard Cranshaw, writes of that event:

*Welcome all wonders in one sight!
Eternity shut in a span!
Summer in Winter, Day in Night!
Heaven in earth, and God in Man!*

The Apostle John tells the story in another way:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

It is said that, back in that once-upon-a-time, when the man and the woman became aware of the darkness, they also became aware of how the light exposed them; they became aware of their nakedness before each other and before God. It had never bothered them before. But now they feared the light, and the way it exposed them. And that remains true even today. Many still fear the light, because they fear their nakedness and barrenness will be revealed. So they hide in the darkness and curse the light.

To stand in the light is to stand exposed to God and to one another, and that can be frightening. But to stand in the light is also to stand where we can see clearly once again, to stand in innocence, to have a new beginning.

John says elsewhere: *(1 John 2:8-14)*

⁸ Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Whoever says, "I am in the light," while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹ But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

*¹² I am writing to you, little children,
because your sins are forgiven on account of his name.*

*¹³ I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.*

*I am writing to you, young people,
because you have conquered the evil one.*

*¹⁴ I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.*

*I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.*

*I write to you, young people,
because you are strong
and the word of God abides in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.*

The darkness still casts its shadow over us. Our exposure to the light makes us painfully aware of the darkness yet remaining within us. Yet to stand in that light is to accept the promise of a new day and of a new beginning. There is a new day, a new Eden for you and me. A light, a star, shines upon our world, beckoning and drawing us with its promise. If we believe in it, it will come and dwell within us, and bathe us in light. And we live in the promise that one day the promise will be fulfilled, all shadows shall flee away, death shall die, and God's new day shall shine forever, even as it began to shine in Bethlehem two thousand years ago.

May you live in the light of that promise, in the brightness of that hope, with the eternal light of Christ shining within you. Until He brings you into the glory of His new day, may you continue to abide in Him, until He makes all things new.

To him be all glory, honour, majesty and praise. Amen.