

I Advent

November 30, 2014

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Isaiah 64:1-9           We are the clay, you are our potter.

1 Corinthians 1:3-9    You are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait

Mark 13:24-37         Keep awake

Yesterday I needed a small floor mat to place in our kitchen, so I went to Pier One Imports to find one. Walking into that store was instant sensory overload: blinking Christmas lights, red ceramic Christmas trees and satin bells, and statues of Santa, snowmen, elves, and reindeer. The store was sparkling and musical and happy, and not a sign of Christ in what was being prepared for. The experience got me thinking about the lights of Christmas versus the light of Christ at Christmas.

John's prologue tells us about the light of Christ: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning... In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it... The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world."

This image of Christ carrying the light of God's essence into the world shapes the image that we enact at the Easter Vigil. We begin that service with a darkened church; a new fire is lighted outside near the bell tower; the fire is used to light a taper which lights a Christ Candle that is carried into the church. As the candle is brought to the altar, other candles are lighted, and lights are turned on and brightened as we chant: "The Light of Christ; Thanks be to God." At Christmas, the light of Christ, that is, the essence of the power of God, came to us as a human baby. Our focus during Advent season is to consider how much this world needs God's light, and how much we each need this divine light in our life.

Sometimes I think that our generation needs the light of Christ more than any previous generation. Let me share with you a newspaper editorial:

"The world is too big for us. Too much is going on; too many crimes, too much violence and excitement. Try as you will, you get behind in the race, in spite of yourself. It's an incessant strain to keep pace... and still, you lose ground. Science empties its discoveries on you so fast that you stagger beneath them in hopeless bewilderment. The political world is news seen so rapidly you're out of breath trying to keep pace with who's in and who's out. Everything is high pressure. Human nature cannot endure much more!" This

was written in *The Atlantic Journal*, on June 16, 1833. Okay, maybe we are not all that unique in human history.

In today's OT reading the prophet Isaiah begs for God to intervene, to show Himself, to take control. Isaiah 64:1 says, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence." Isaiah was mourning over what remained of Jerusalem when Israel returned from their exile in Babylon. Jerusalem lay in ruins, and the Temple had been destroyed. The prophet and the people felt a profound sense of being separated from God; living in darkness. This passage is Isaiah's plea that God would return the light of His presence to His people.

In Mark's Gospel Jesus told his disciples that it was important to notice what was going on around them. They needed to see the signs that God's kingdom is on its way; they needed to be aware; be ready; stay alert; to pay attention to the light that Christ was bringing to them, and would ultimately bring to the whole world. Our awareness of the light of Christ will change how we live; and that will change who we are; and then we become a lamp (not the light) that will bring change to the world that pleases God.

Paul reminds Christians in Corinth, "You are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait." Followers of Christ have all the spiritual connections we need. We know what we need to know. We need to live expectantly, paying attention to the signs, showing the light of Christ to the world.

So getting back to my shopping trip, and all the Christmas lights that blared out the secular side of Christmas; I have decided that for this Christmas, every time I see any Christmas lights, regardless of whether they are lighting a manger scene, or blinking on a reindeer's nose, or outlining the windows and eaves of a home, I am going to say to myself: "The light of Christ – Thanks be to God".

Would you join me in keeping awake to the real message of the approach of Christmas morning? Would you use this little chant from the Easter Vigil, with words that reinforce why we have an Advent season, to use the tools that our secular culture will be putting on display, to remind us that the source of God's light has come before, and will come again?

The Advent challenge is to live expectantly; to be alert; to be ready. May every Christmas light remind us that Christ is the true light of the world. "The light of Christ: Thanks be to God." Amen.