

On Friday Bishop Sharma Lewis of the Virginia Conference shared that all Virginia United Methodist Churches would be closing for the next two weeks due to caution over the Corona Virus. In 11 years of ministry I have never had to close a church for any reason like this. We are all in new territory as we do not know how quickly this virus will spread across the nation.

If you visit any grocery store you will see there is no milk, no toilet paper, no peanut butter, and no paper towels. During this time of uncertainty, it is easy to go to a dark place. We wonder what will happen. How long will everything be closed? Will I become sick? What about the people I love?

Today we take heart that there is one thing in our lives that never changes.

Jesus Christ our hope never changes because Jesus continues to be the light of the world amidst a world of darkness.

During this season of Lent, we have been studying the book “The God We Can Know” by Rob Fuquay which studies in detail the seven “I am” sayings of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John.

For the past two weeks we have looked at parallels between the God who sustained the Israelites and God through Jesus Christ who sustains us with the bread of life. Today our topic is Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

In this book, “The God We Can Know” Rob Fuquay wisely said: “You could say the story of the Bible is one of moving from darkness to light.”ⁱ

Everything started in the darkness. Genesis 1 tells us: “The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep” (Genesis 1:2). The world started in chaos. Nothing could be seen.

God brought order to the chaos and the first thing that God spoke into existence was light (Genesis 1:3).ⁱⁱ From this point on God created everything else and called it good.

Light has always been an important symbol to the people of God. In fact, it even became part of their rituals to celebrate Holy Days in the life of the church. For instance, when celebrating the Festival of Booths also known as the Festival of Tabernacles, the Israelites would take part in an important service of light. It was called the “Grand Illumination.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Rob Fuquay shares that this service included lighting “giant torches” so that the whole land was illumined.^{iv} People would stay up all night singing and spending time in fellowship and because of all the giant torches around there was never a time when the darkness overtook the light.

This was an important moment for the Israelites. Just as God had asked the Israelites to institute the Passover to remember how God saved them, we see that the moment the Israelites reached the Promised Land God through Moses asked the Israelites to begin this tradition, celebrating the “Festival of Booths.”

The point of this festival was to celebrate how God led the Israelites safely through the wilderness and provided for their needs.

On the day the Israelites reached the Promised Land after 40 years of wandering they crossed a threshold. No longer would God lead them by a pillar of cloud during the day, and a pillar of fire at night. No longer would they wake up to manna and quail and receive water from rocks.

They had now been led to a place that would provide for their needs. A place to call home. They would still need God’s provision on their lives, but now it would take on a different form.

I think this moment was bittersweet for the Israelites. They had lived a nomadic lifestyle for so long and now they would stop traveling and settle down. For many I think this was a joyful moment, no more wandering in the wilderness.

For others, I think this was a moment of fear. Each day their life consisted of waking up, following the pillar of cloud, following the pillar of fire and eating what God provided for them. They didn’t have to think for themselves, all they had to do was follow God.

Sometimes I think, wow this would have been a lot easier way to embody our faith. Can you imagine how great it would be if all we had to do was wake up and follow God?

For us, it feels that following God is harder. We don’t have a pillar of cloud to follow by day, or a pillar of fire by night, or Moses to help us discern what God is calling us to do. For us, especially in these uncertain times it can be difficult to follow God or even to know where to look for God.

And yet, in the Gospel of John, Jesus shows us that God is still at work leading us forward.

Rob Fuquay tells us it was at this very same festival celebration, the 7-day long Festival of Booths, during this same “Grand Illumination” ceremony where Jesus shared: “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12).

Fuquay shares that in other words, “Jesus was saying, ‘For those who understand life is a journey, for those who seek light and direction through all of life’s stopping places, I will be your pillar.’”^v

It was in this moment during this festival that Jesus was showing the people that through Him God continues to lead us forward to the light. That through Him God will continue to illuminate even the darkest days of our lives through the hope we find in Jesus Christ.

In our Gospel lesson today from John 8 we see that there was a woman who found herself in darkness. This woman who was caught in the act of adultery was about to be stoned to death and the guy that she was caught with was nowhere to be seen. She was the one who was going to pay for this. She probably thought, “My life is over.” The darkness was closing in.

Then as someone drew back to through the first rock at her, they dropped it on the ground. “Thud” another rock “thud, thud” then two more, but wait none were hitting her. Then she looked up. Jesus had come to save her.

That day the light of Christ took on the form of forgiveness; the forgiveness offered to the woman by the crowd, and the forgiveness offered to the women by Jesus Christ.

The woman experienced the inbreaking of the kingdom of God through all who were there who examined their hearts and knew that they too were sinners in need of God’s grace. That they too were in need of God’s forgiveness.

We see ourselves in the faces of the crowd. Sometimes we judge other people instead of trying to help them. We see ourselves in desperate eyes of the women. Sometimes in life we desperately need someone to help us, but so often we are afraid to ask for help, especially in times when we find ourselves in darkness.

There is a lot of darkness in the world friends. Whether it is the darkness of despair, grief, depression or addiction, or the darkness of sin, we all experience darkness on a daily basis.

Just listen to the news. So often we hear more about what is wrong in the world than what is beautiful in the world.

It is easier to complain and judge others and take part in the continuing the darkness than to see the silver lining of heaven that is always present through our faith.

What is beautiful about our faith, is the moment we start getting lost in the darkness, the Holy Spirit whispers to us: “Look! The light is shining through, even if it is a crack.”

You see the kingdom of God is inbreaking all around us.

We see the inbreaking of the kingdom where the light of Christ shines through the cracks of brokenness in our lives and in the world. We see the inbreaking of the kingdom when people make sure the most vulnerable have what they need during this pandemic. We see the inbreaking of the kingdom of God, when we take part in shining hope into a situation that seems hopeless.

I have always been fascinated with “kintsugi” which is an ancient Japanese method of fixing broken pottery. I don’t know about you, but anytime I break something valuable I try and glue it back together. My goal is to not be able to see any cracks.

What is different about the practice of “kintsugi” is that the whole point is that you celebrate the cracks in the pottery. This is done by repairing the broken pottery with gold. This way the broken pot is not something to be upset about, but now is a one of a kind piece with a story to share.

I love this practice of mending broken pottery and making the cracks shine with gold because this is the way God loves us. Even when we sin and complain like the Israelites, even when we leap to judgement when someone else has sinned, God keeps coming back to find us and lead us to a better place. Jesus keeps shining the light in the darkness of our lives.

The good news for our lives today is that when we trust in God and continue to follow God on this journey of discipleship, God redeems even the most broken pieces of our lives.

The good news for our lives today is that even in the midst of this current pandemic, we have hope because we are the people of God and Christ will continue to shine His light in the darkness so we can move forward.

May we boldly go forward from this place knowing God will continue to lead us forward through our faith in Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ Rob Fuquay. “The God We Can Know.” Upper Room Books. Nashville, TN. 2014. P. 40.

ⁱⁱ Ibid. P. 40.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. P. 45.

^{iv} Ibid. P.

^v Ibid. P. 45

Additional Resource

Keck et al. “The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary.” Vol. IX. Abingdon Press. Nashville, TN. 1995.