

Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
December 11, 2011

Isaiah 61:1-4, 6-11; John: 6-8, 19-28  
"Testify to the Light"

The first paragraph of the Gospel according to John read today is the key text for today's sermon. It says: "There was man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light." (6-8)

John downplays the light in himself in order to emphasize the special light in Jesus. We all are lights and especially John who was sent from God.

It's interesting that in this famous prologue according to John where Jesus as "Word" is emphasized that John sneaks in the brilliant concept of light.

Why "light?" I read on the plane to South Africa a book called *From Science to God: A Physicist's Journey into the Mystery of Consciousness* where light was a major theme.

The chapter entitled "The Mystery of Light" begins with a quote by Albert Einstein who said, "For the rest of my life I want to reflect on what light is." The author of the book Peter Russell goes on to explain how light is the element in the universe that can help science-oriented folk make the leap from the physical universe into the spiritual realm.

Space and time contract to nothing if they travel at the speed of light in a continuum and matter expands to infinity at the same speed in a continuum. This is my best summary of how light corresponds with the spirit.

The book does an excellent job in explaining all this through the theory of relativity and quantum theory.

It is no wonder that John expresses the coming of God into the world in Jesus as light. Most major religions have light as a recurrent theme.

Those who have awakened to the truth about reality – whom we often call illumined, or enlightened – frequently describe their experiences in terms of light.

The Sufi Abu 'l-Hosian al-Nuri experienced a light "gleaming in the Unseen...I gazed at it continually, until the timing came when I had wholly become that light."

The tenth-century Christian mystic St. Symeon saw "a light infinite and incomprehensible...one single light...simple, non-composite, timeless, eternal...the source of life."

The difference between these experiences of light, as valid as they are, and John's affirmation of light is that the former point to light as a spiritual element in the cosmos, in the consciousness and in themselves whereas John points to the light in Jesus. For just this moment John is a Master of Ceremonies. His purpose is to welcome to the stage the star of the show. He is not the star. Jesus is the star. "He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light."

The bill for the show describes in concepts of light the main actor and why it would be good to see him and the show. When the show begins we turn the first page of John's gospel and see the greatest show on earth where Jesus is described later as the light of the world and the true light who enlightens everyone.

How might this be? Today is the third Sunday of Advent and we have heard in the lighting of the Advent candle expressions of the realm of God with the coming light of Christ. Each Sunday the scriptures of the earlier lighting have been read with the addition of one scripture. Each reading enlightens the soul with the light of God's realm. Each verse throws light on our lives as Christians. They encourage us to walk in the light.

Today we heard Melissa and Lori read:

We light this candle as a sign of the coming light of Christ.

Advent means coming.

We are preparing ourselves for the days

when the nations shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning-hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.                      Isaiah 2:4

The light of Jesus is peace. Why don't we see that? I'm irritated with Christians or Muslims or Hindus or Sikhs or Buddhists or Confucianists or Jains who as adherents of their religions or members of society kill each other or turn to war against others as a viable option to settle differences or to conquer for material gain. We need a strong military defense against those who want to exploit us but we don't build weapons to proactively engage in wars for profit. We should be beating our swords into plowshares in other words build our economy with food not bombs.

The Advent candle lighting always ends with the line: "Let us walk in the light of the Lord." When it comes to the military industrial complex, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Light for Christians is spirituality grounded in praxis.

Then we heard from Lori and Melissa:

The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.                      Isaiah 11:6



We can really appreciate Einstein's desire to study nothing but light and even more so can we appreciate and be grateful for the light of Christ who came into the world so we too can live in the light and believe! Amen.