

Galatians 4: 4-7
Preferring the Darkness
First Presbyterian Church
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Dec. 9, 2007
Second Sunday of Advent

In the Gospel of John we read that Jesus came into the world as light, but the people preferred to remain in darkness. What were they thinking? How could they not be drawn to him and convinced by his teaching? How could they not see that he was God's Son with special powers? How could they be so blind as to go on believing in idols or to keep waiting for Messiah? How could they not be won over by his positions?

Our questions, of course, come with 21 centuries of hindsight. Our questions come because with a legacy of the written Word and repeated interpretations of the Word we just don't see how the people John was addressing could have missed the signs. But perhaps the harder question is for our own generation. How do we understand the words of John when he says Jesus came to be the light of the world? What meaning does that have for us? Is it all about people in the first century or is it about us as well?

The traditional texts for Advent are rather dark. They usually point to that time in the future when the world as we know it will end and the kingdom of God will become a total reality. For the people of biblical times the day of the Lord was going to be a dark and terrifying time. And when people put the lectionary together they felt that Advent was a good time to remind us that we are waiting not just for Christmas but for that final appearance of Christ on the earth. As we prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus the first time we need to be reminded that he will come again. But somewhere between that first coming and the coming that remains in the

future is the present moment. What does it mean that Jesus comes to be light in the present moment? What does it mean that Christ comes to be the light in your life?

I suppose there are several answers to those questions but with the help of our text this morning I want to look at one way in which Christ is light for our lives in this present moment. Paul says, “when the fullness of time had come”. There are echoes here of the creation story. “When God began to create the heavens and the earth”. There are many ways to understand the fullness of time. When the world was ready, when the darkness had reached its deepest point, when the world had been connected by the Pax Romana, when God decided it was time.

In the fullness of time God acted. God took the initiative and sent God’s own son into the world. Jesus could have come like God came to the Israelites in the Old Testament. In a cloud thundering from atop Mt. Siani. In a burning bush in the middle of the desert. In a pillar of fire. In lightning. As an angel. Through the voice of prophets. In the actions of the king. Jesus could have come supernaturally. He could have come wielding power and might. He could have been like a super hero.

But he wasn’t. He was born of a woman just like every other human that has drawn breath. He was subject to all the laws of the universe including the laws of birth and death. He came with all the emotions that humans experience. He bumped into all the limitations that restrict humans. He laid aside his divine prerogatives as the Son of God and assumed the mantle of flesh and blood. Our faith has always affirmed that he was in every way human.

And one of the things that Jesus came to teach us was what human life is capable of. What God intended human life to be like. God sent Jesus into

this world to redeem human life, to buy it back from all the forces that had distorted it.

There is no end to the voices that tell us how we should live life. “Look out for number one. Take care of yourself first. Choose a career that will make the most money possible. Be a success. Have a little fun. Indulge yourself, you deserve it. Put your family first. Give something to charity.” But Jesus taught by his own example that if you are going to live the life God intended there are two basic rules. First, you use the gifts God has put within you - not for yourself - but for the common good. You give your life away literally. And secondly, you have been given life so that you might bring good news to the poor, bring about release for those who are being held captive, help the blind to see, and work for the freedom of the oppressed. In our world there are thousands of ways of doing each of those things and that is the purpose of human life.

Jesus taught us by word and deed that the highest good of human life is love. Not the love that comes easily and is returned in kind. But the love that embraces even the enemy and the unlovable. Jesus came to make sure that we understand that love isn't an optional emotion to be used for a few selected people in our lives or called on in rare moments. Love is the mainspring of life. In everything we do as humans the goal is to love. To be fully human is to make your life work to love.

And in the life of Jesus we learn that human life is all about relationship. It isn't about wealth or power or success or achievement. It is about our relationship with the One who gave us life. Jesus came to show us that we can be in a deep, personal, intimate, and enduring relationship with God. He came to teach us that God's love has broken down any barriers that would have separated us from God and we are free to relate to God one on

one without intermediaries. Human life is meant to be lived in communion with God .

Jesus Christ came to shed light on our human condition. To let us know that to be human is perhaps God's greatest gift. But in the life and teachings of Christ we can also see that much darkness has come into our life.