

This Little Light of Mine

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” *John 1:1-5*

I’ll confess that it wasn’t until I was deep into graduate school, making my way through Jürgen Moltmann, that I began to have any sense of the opening to the gospel of John. The synoptics were deceptively straight-forward, and for this reason, were my regular “go-to” texts when covering gospel material.

But if there was ever a text in the Christian New Testament that laid bare the emptiness of the anti-intellectualism that has gripped at least some of our Christian siblings, John was that fresh reminder that spirit-filled *theological* teaching was not mere suggestion, but a necessity.

Here we are reminded that all of creation is imbued with the Logos, with *wisdom*, and that creation itself bears witness to the primordial, sense-making Word (here I am thinking of folks like Catherine Keller and Susan Hedahl).

It is a light for all of creation, and the darkness cannot overcome it. It is wisdom that calls for response, for action. This wisdom of God snaps us back to attention, it brings us back to God’s concerns, it reminds us of God’s commitment to the displaced, abused, and oppressed – it teaches us that God’s justice isn’t just about some future end of time moment, but is wrapped up in our daily salvation, in our daily response to God’s grace.

Are we prepared to hear?

At the same time, my own thinking implies a binary that we ought to avoid (that God’s concern is merely singular), or at least it draws our attention to the reality that we are embedded in the world in such a way that we cannot extricate ourselves. God’s justice is for *them* and for *us*. Even the oppressor must be liberated.

Perhaps this is why Jesus draws us back to an important intersectional reality: that *love of God* and *love of neighbor* function to keep us grounded, focused, and humbled, to balance our commitments to God’s reality (which is already here) and God’s call to justice (the reality yet to come).

This is the Christian scandal of incarnation – that through the cross, all of creation is united with and to God’s project of love. That even though Christ is revealed to us in a specific moment in time, we have also never existed apart from God’s love.

But sometimes it takes a little faith to make sense of light and love.

Whether we see it or not, we are surrounded by waves of fear, anxiety, and violence. There are good reasons to feel these things and even better reasons, as pastors, to not try and tell folks they should feel differently.

Living into God’s grace, God’s compassion, God’s love is not a linear process, in much the same way that our traumas are non-linear. Christian faith is as much an integrative process as it is a salvific one, and I suspect that much damage in the American church has been done through the embrace of a cheap grace, an antinomian salvation, one that sacrifices our deep engagement of the suffering of the world for superficial church experiences.

And yet, I am encouraged by the work that is building. I have had the immense pleasure of visiting many vibrant communities of faith across Rhode Island. I see the dynamism of their preaching, their heart for God, and their service in their communities.

For its part, the Council of Churches elected a new slate of executive officers in December, and two new board members joined us. We have eight folks who have signed on to serve as social justice commissioners, our theological work (faith and order) is picking up again, and our individual, congregational, and ecumenical membership continues to grow. We are joining with numerous organizations across the state, religious and secular, to address the growing problems of homelessness, poverty, war, Christian Nationalism, and gun violence.

I have never been concerned with seeing the promised land – it would be enough to catch a glimpse. If along this life's journey I get to be a part of moving the **house of love** forward *just a little bit*, then I will give thanks to God for the grace to be a part of it.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it...the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.”

2025 has arrived – and we are read