

God gives Advent promises providing a way through the darkness...there will be a way towards life once more flourishing in blessing, safety and growth for all because that is who God is. With words of comfort and love, God calls us out of despair, to get up in the dark, and claim that new life and blessings will be known.

And so, you and I make the journey to Bethlehem again this year to the place where heaven and earth are joined at the manger. We make the journey letting go of our fears and sins and losses, allowing God's words of comfort, peace and hope embrace us. God's hope and love embrace others as we share them in word and deed. In Christ's life God shares, valleys will be lifted, mountains lowered, the crooked straight, and the rough places smooth. Our wildernesses will become habitations of grace rather than places of loneliness and despair as God's reign reaches into the darkness of our hearts and lives and into the world.

Christ's life is larger and stronger than life's losses and the sin of the world revealed in the Coronavirus pandemic, and even in our own sins and failures. Advent proclaims new life is coming into our world from God. We will meet Jesus in our neighbors, especially among the poor and those struggling to find hope. After all, the Christ child was first known to his displaced parents who had to sleep in a stable, to poor shepherds in cold fields, and to lowly animals. And as the light of the heavens exploded in angelic hosts that night of Jesus' birth, the light of God's presence will beam brightly into this world through us.

In my homily on Sunday, I shared a story from the childhood of author Robert Louis Stevenson growing up in Edinburgh, Scotland. One evening, just as dusk was turning to darkness, young Robert had his face pinned to the window, fixed on the lamplighter coming down the street with his ladder and burning wick, lighting the gas streetlamps and setting them ablaze for the night.

Watching their son, his parents asked him, 'Robert, what in the world are you looking at?' With great excitement he exclaimed, 'Look at that man! He's punching holes in the darkness!'

**Punching holes in the darkness!** This is what God is doing for us in Christ Jesus. And this is the way we will find our own way out of the darkness and into new joys and possibilities of life that lie ahead.

We are punching holes in the darkness when we joyfully string Christmas lights up all over our homes and neighborhoods! We are punching holes in the darkness through our own words and deeds of comfort and help for others. We punch a hole in the darkness when we offer a kind or even forgiving smile when we could have more easily chastised or rebuked. We punch holes in the darkness through our TFCE ministries of outreach in caring for the hungry, the poor, and the stranger, as well as in our striving for racial justice and in so many, many ways. This is what we're doing this Saturday morning in our contactless food drive; this is what we will do Sunday when we prepare meals for the homeless at the Bailey's Crossroads Shelter; and this is what we have done through our Angel Tree giving. This is what we do when we stand on Broad Street in silent witness against racial injustice. We are punching holes in the darkness!

We punch holes in the darkness when we reach out to those who are lonely or hurting, doing what we can to love our neighbors as ourselves. There are so many points of light and love we can offer....so many ways we announce and show a way home for ourselves and others now.

So, friends, let's keep punching holes in the darkness. The world needs for us not to be afraid, to not shrink back, ***for the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it!***