

Love's Pure Light
John 1:1-18
December 16, 2018 – Third Sunday of Advent

Today we continue our journey through advent, with the verses of Silent Night. For the past three weeks, Rev. Alice has hosted a devotional time before church when attendees have been invited to journey through Advent by examining the various name of Jesus. I need to tell you that I did not plan our morning sermons to coordinate with that devotional, but obviously the Holy Spirit had other plans. So, on the on the First Sunday of Advent, we spoke of Jesus as the *Sar Shalom*, the “Prince of Peace.” Last Sunday, we concentrated on Emmanuel – “God with us,” and remember I suggested that each of us take the liberty to personalize that word, making Emmanuel – “God with me.”

Today, we come to the third verse of “Silent Night” -

Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light.

I have sometimes “defined” Jesus as the very personification of God's Amazing Love, the embodiment of *agape* love in human form. Remember this church's definition of *agape* – “Greek for love without limits.” And, indeed, the love of God in the person of Jesus has no limits.

I've stated before, that one of the reasons I'm a United Methodist is the Wesleyan doctrine of grace. Grace is God's love for all God's people; and all means all – no exceptions. I tell you, there is not a person on this planet that God does not love. Indeed, the actions of some of those people may truly break God's heart; but God still loves the person, whether they know it or not, whether they believe it or not, whether they accept it or not. That's grace. And so our hymn continues –

Radiant beams from Thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace.

At this point you might not be surprised if I told you that this third verse is my favorite in the hymn. It tells us that Jesus was born in love, to radiate God's love to the world. Thus, I wonderfully pairs that love with light.

And that brings me to our scripture for today. I truly love the opening of John's Gospel; and I'd like to read it to you again, this time from Eugene Peterson's paraphrase, *The Message*:

The Word was first,
the Word present to God,
God present to the Word.
The Word was God,
in readiness for God from day one.

Everything was created through him;
nothing – not one thing! –
came into being without him
What came into existence was Life,
and the Life was Light to live by.
The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness;
and the darkness couldn't put it out.

The Life-Light was the real thing:
Every person entering Life
he brings into Light.
We was in the world,
the world was there through him,
and yet the world didn't even notice.
He came to his own people,
but they didn't want him.
But whoever did want him,
who believed he was who he claimed
and would do what he said,
He made to be their true selves,
the child-of-God selves.
These are the God-begotten,
not blood-begotten,
not flesh-begotten,
not sex-begotten.

The Word become flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighborhood.
We saw the glory with our own eyes,
the one-of-a-kind glory,
like Father, like Son,
Generous inside and out,
true from start to finish.

Yes, this brings us to another name for Jesus: the Word of God. In Greek, the word for “Word” is *Logos*, it means “Word,” yes; but it means a lot more. It means the knowledge, the common wisdom, the total understanding. Think of the “Word of God” as the sum total knowledge of all that is, all that was, and all that will ever be. That’s the dimension of God, embodied in the Christ. And the “Word” was “Light,” yet another name for Jesus – “Son of God, Love’s pure light.”

The dualism of Light vs. Darkness occurs throughout the Gospels, but most especially in the Gospel of John. Even today, Darkness is often equated with evil. “Meeting someone in a dark alley” is generally not thought of as a good thing; and then there’s the Star Wars metaphor of “The Dark Side of the Force.” But Jesus... Jesus is the Light of the World, and the Light shined in the darkness; but the darkness could not put it out.

“Radiant beams from Thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace.” “Radiate” is another of my favorite words. Yes, I know. I have a long list of favorite words.” But I like that word “Radiate.” I sometimes pray that we would be filled with the Love of God. Today, I might say, “filled with redeeming grace.” And I pray that we would be so filled with the love of God, so filled to overflowing, that the love, the light, would truly radiate from us.

This week, for the first time, I actually looked up “radiate” in the dictionary. “Radiate: to send out rays of heat, light, energy, etc.” “Radiant beams from Thy holy face. . .” Now, of course, the song is speaking of Jesus – Son of God, love’s pure light.” But you know, the interesting thing about “radiation” is when we get it, we share it.

Think of it as heat. If we get warm enough by the love of God, if we catch fire with the love of God, those around us will also experience the warmth of God’s great love. Think of it as light. If the light shines brightly enough in our lives, it will shine forth from us, so that others will also experience that light. I thought about discussing nuclear radiation at this point, but decided that I was getting on “thin ice.” There are others here that have a far better knowledge of nuclear physics than I do.

So, let’s turn back to love. Indeed, there is no greater gift in the world than the gift of God’s love. We can’t earn it. We don’t deserve it. But to experience it, all we need to do is open our arms and accept it. And once we accept it; it will start to fill us; and the more we accept, the more we experience, the fuller we get; and the fuller we get the more love will radiate from us.

The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood. Friends, Jesus didn’t move into the neighborhood, simply because he had no place else to go. No, Jesus moved into the neighborhood so his radiating love could be closer to you and to me. Jesus moved into the neighborhood so that we could

experience the radiation up close and personal. Jesus moved into the neighborhood to so fill us with *agape* love, that we cannot help but radiate that love to others.

It's Advent. It's a time when once again, we prepare our hearts for the coming anew of our Lord and Savior. "Silent Night" is not just a song about the events of 2000 years ago. No, "Silent Night" is a song of today as we long for, as we pray for, and as we live for "love's pure light." And so, I ask, "Is Jesus welcome in your neighborhood?" Does your neighborhood welcome God's redeeming grace, radiating in beams of love's purest light? Is your neighborhood ready to share the love of God with all the people of God, and all means all – no exceptions?

Let us pray. . .

Holy Lord,

Open our hearts and open our lives,
so we might be filled with your love.

Then, lead us and guide us, that we might
truly radiate love's true light to all whom we meet,
not just at Christmas, but every day of our lives.

Amen.

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