

I am particularly fond of the opening passage from John's gospel because of its almost lyrical unfolding of how God chooses to be in relationship with creation. This is also the passage I had to exegete from the original Greek New Testament in seminary in front of my peers. The images of "Word", "light", "darkness" are infused with meaning, and both are quite necessary for navigating life yet are also quite often overlooked and taken for granted. Jesus, as Word and light, has always been, but because we needed more to see him, God took on physical form, flesh and bone, so that we could have a better chance of seeing what is hidden in plain sight all along. Science, by teaching us about Nature, teaches us about the Creator Through the life, witness, and saving grace of Jesus, we can experience and know the God we cannot see. Science teaches us light travels 186,000 miles per second and when leaves it's original destination, several light years to reach be tomorrow and brings up interesting question what does time mean? Cosmos is changing and is still being created from and stars are being born and stars are dying.

The Word he proposes to us is not only a message then, it is a dynamic, creative force. He goes on to say: "He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made." This Word brings order out of chaos, it reverses the order of nature - that seems to rule this world This Word, John says, is a life-giving and meaning-giving power.

John tells us that even though Jesus came among God's beloved people, not all of them accepted him. Not much has changed. Even though we have the witness of 2000-plus years of faithful disciples and also the recorded account of scripture, not all of humankind sees Jesus or God today. The Holy Spirit is a powerful connector in our world that can stir the human mind and heart if we human beings listen to the Holy Spirit. The problem is do we listen to Holy Spirit? Human nature rears its ugly head for power, control. Instead we as God's people gather inclusively for worship, even more often in the poor, the lonely, the imprisoned, the widowed and orphaned, the marginalized and the hungry among us. Not all people accept the United Church of Christ, which has a rich history of inclusivity. Conservative folks cannot understand why we include the LGBTQI brothers and sisters them in our worship and ordination as Ministers. We being examples of Light. Jesus adamant who we to Judge? We first welcome women, first along with Quakers cry out against slavery and today with

systematic racism. UCC welcomed me with my physical challenge. I have I lived and witnessed people who did not accept me and even today, when many other denominations and nondominations would not welcome me. One specific Denomination told me cannot be a minister because I could not speak. Yet guidance and love, hospitality of Professor in UCC, started the process of ordination into UCC. That is radical love. That is being the light and understanding the law of all laws by Jesus and that is the central commandment of Jesus is love your neighbor.

We need those among us who, like John, can point to the light of Christ and help us see and experience the grace and mercy so freely given. We need to let go of our quest for black-and-white, and cookie cutter answers and piece cutting of scriptures that ultimately fail to satisfy and do not illumine the truth of God's love for all of creation. We need the beloved community and the relationships that come from connection within the Body of Christ to help us see Jesus among us and in this world.

Yes, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Creative, creating, redeeming, and loving always and forever.

After the great London Fire 1665, St Paul's Cathedral was set to be rebuilt with architect and builder Wren to oversee the project. When the excursion was complete the monarch Queen Anne was asked for her opinion on Cathedral. She toured the building for hours and she told Wren that the new building was amusing, awful, and artificial. Remarkably, Wren did not feel insulted; instead, he was greatly pleased. In the 1600s amusing meant amazing, awful meant awe-inspiring, and artificial meant artistic. You see how words change over the years? We call this the study of etymology and why so many translations of the scripture and how words changed through the years. Still the Word made flesh seeks to turn our mourning into joy, to comfort us, to give us gladness instead of sorrow, to join the dance of the cosmos. This text from John recognizes that there is an interconnectivity between all living things and human beings. In that interconnectedness that we can learn a great deal when we honor and celebrate each other. We are to not condemn each other and fill self-righteous behavior know it all, we all fall short of glory of God.

Robert Fulghum begins the story rambling about a trip he made to Greece. On that trip he met Alexander Papaderos, a doctor of Philosophy, who worked for many years trying to bring peace between the bitterly divided countries of Europe after World War II. Near the end of this story, Fulghum tells how he asked professor Papaderos why he does what he does. Papaderos explained his motivation for doing so by telling a story from his childhood .

"When I was a small child," he said, "during the war we were poor and lived in a remote village. One day, on the road, I found the broken pieces of a mirror. A German motorcycle had been wrecked in that place.

"I tried to find all the pieces and put them together, but it was impossible, so I kept only the largest piece . . . By scratching it on a stone, I made it round. I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun would never shine – in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places I could find.

"I kept the little mirror, and as I went about my growing up, I would take it out at idle moments and continue the challenge of the game. As I became a man, I grew to understand that this was a metaphor for what I might do with my life. I came to understand that I am not the light or the source of the light. The light – truth, understanding, knowledge – is there, and it will only shine in many dark places if I reflect it.

"I am a fragment of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I have, I can reflect light into the dark places of the world – into the black places in the hearts of men – and change some things in people. Perhaps others may see and do likewise."

Fulghum then tells how professor Papaderos took the same mirror and caught the sun's

light and turned it toward Fulghum's face and then onto his hands.

As I remembered the story of professor Papaderos, I suddenly realized that the goal is to be so effective at reflecting God's light that people see God in us – much as the followers of John the Baptist had apparently seen in his life.

For that to happen, we must find a way to be close to the God's heart. We must find ways to “resonate” God's love. We must find ways to see the world through God's eyes so that the world will see God's eyes in us.

There is a song written by Gary Chapman and since I first heard Amy Grant sing it while I was in college. In the chorus, he says:

When people look inside my life, I want to hear them say:
 She's got her Father's eyes, her Father's eyes
 Eyes that find the good in things when good is not around,
 Eyes that find the source of help when help just can't be found.
 Eyes full of compassion, seeing ev'ry pain,
 Knowin' what you're goin' through and feelin' it the same,
 Just like my Father's eyes .

That can only happen if we will tune our hearts to the heart of God but too often I am reminded that the darkness hasn't changed. It's still dark. There are still places of physical , emotional and spiritual darkness. Darkness is evident in every church, in every organization, in politics and in families.

There are still places filled with violence and vice. There is road-rage and drive by shootings. There is war and rumors of war. There is famine caused by natural disaster. There is hunger caused by poor distribution. Economic inequality and disparity. Hatred. There is disharmony. Verbal attacks instead of listening, learning and growing.

The darkness hasn't changed.

What has changed is our ability – no, our willingness – to reflect the light of God into the dark corners of our world.

You see, when I looked at the moon this week I realized that the moon has no light of its own to offer. It merely reflects the light of the sun. Even in the nighttime, the sun is at work.

Even in our darkened world, God is at work when we allow the light to be reflected from us.

The mystery of the Incarnation is that God still comes to us; the wonder is that the light still shines through us.

Just like a marriage, whether it heterosexual or same sex marriage, it is seldom perfect, it is always a work in progress, it requires work to iron out our differences and accept one another's flaws and shortcomings, to forgive, to trust, to love and to go forward together. It is difficult. It is also "awful, amusing, and artificial."

This text considers the way the Word is embodied in the life that we share together, "in the extraordinary care that opens a home to a broken body in need. The Word is embodied in the extravagant feeding of people who can no longer cook warm meals for themselves. The Word becomes flesh when it embraces with love the stranger who has come home or a church home. How is the Word embodied in your midst? We might wonder today how our churches would be transformed if all of our members thought of themselves as witnesses who testify to the Light, as John did. And then we might dream of how the world around us would be transformed as well.

And it is still true - that our lives often seem insignificant and our actions meaningless in the face of the magnitude of the world's problems. Yet we also live in the promise that the light that shines in and through our lives is part of a greater light that will lighten the whole world. It is not the magnitude of our actions that matters, but our willingness to be witnesses to the Light which disperses all darkness. Our legs must be the reflection of light and scatters all darkness around us.

It is through the work of spiritual practice that we move beyond fear into compassion and discover our deep practice of un-saying rather than saying; letting go rather than adding on; listening for the still, small voice within rather than filling our brains with dogmas, liturgies, and legal structures. A spirituality of unsaying can be achieved through many practices such as contemplative prayer, dream interpretation, expression creativity God given to us as human beings art as meditation, dance, etc.

My hope is that in this new year, people will look at each of us and see God's eyes. My prayer is that people will look at our church and experience the love of God.

May your Christ Candles be your metaphor tonight, a reminder that the light of Christ reflects off you to a world in darkness. May it be "awful, amusing, and artificial."