**April 4, 2021 John 1:1-18, 20:19-23**

***A Light in Darkness***

**Scripture:** John 1:1-18 NRSV

*(1)In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2)He was in the beginning with God. (3)All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being (4)in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. (5)The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (6)There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. (7)He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. (8)He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. (9)The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. (10)He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. (11)He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. (12)But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, (13)who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. (14)And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (15)(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") (16)From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (17)The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (18)No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.*

John 20:19-23 NRSV

*(19)When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." (20)After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (21)Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (22)When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. (23)If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

**Notes:**

1. The disciples were locked in a room, in need of the ***light***.
   1. The disciples were feeling as if there were no ***future***.
   2. Then Jesus, the ***Light***, went to them, where they were.
   3. ***Light*** overcame darkness through death and resurrection.
2. The disciples needed to see that Jesus is the ***Light***.
   1. If we don’t grasp that ***Jesus*** *is* ***God***, then the magnitude of the incarnation is reduced.
   2. Jesus **desires**to be with us.
3. We need reminded that the ***Light*** has come into the world.
   1. Jesus came to earth to live among ***broken*** people.
   2. Whatever darkness we are facing, ***Jesus*** is with us.
   3. Jesus declares ***peace*** over us in the midst of our darkness.
4. We are people of ***light***, sent to share the ***light*** of Christ.
   1. we are to be ***peacemakers*** in the world around us.
   2. Those who have encountered the light of Christ are to ***illuminate*** the world.
5. The ***kingdom*** of God is at work in our world now.
   1. The ***resurrection*** frees us from the power of sin and death, and it ***empowers*** us to live in peace.
   2. There is ***light*** for the world too.
   3. Look the darkness of our world in its face and dispel it with ***love***, with ***grace***, and with the ***light*** that is Jesus.

**Script:**

Generally, on Easter Sunday, we know what the text will be. We will find Mary in the garden, staring at an empty tomb, asking where Jesus is, and then jubilantly declaring to the disciples that he is risen. But that is not our text today. Instead, we read words about the beginning. We read words about the Word of God. We read about light and darkness.

We are a people who know darkness. We’ve seen it on full display over the past year. So many of us have seen death up close and personal. A small virus changed rapidly and spread at alarming speeds. We watched as hundreds of thousands of people around the world got infected, got sick, were hospitalized, and died, often without family and friends close to them. We observed, as the pandemic spread, the numerous ways that the darkness of selfishness rose to the surface. People hoarding supplies while others went without merchants increasing prices because they knew they could make more profit while everybody is running scared. We watched—or maybe we even became—people who looked out for their own best interests over the interests of their neighbors.

In the midst of the darkness of a pandemic, another grim darkness rose to the surface In the United States in 2020, the darkness of racism rose to the surface once again, something so deeply embedded into our society many of us were alarmed to recognize it for the first time for what it was. We watched the darkness of people unwilling to hear, unwilling to see, unwilling to be freed from their own racism. Some of us watched that darkness rise up in ourselves. We may not acknowledge it to others, but in our deepest innermost being we wonder about our attitudes towards those of different races. These things are added to the myriad of other darknesses we have seen or faced job loss, illness, poverty, despair, depression, and we could go on and on. We are a people who know darkness.

So maybe of all Easters, this Easter is an appropriate one to stray from the common story in order to be reminded once again that, while we are people who know darkness as the people of God, as people of resurrection we also know the light. Turn with me now to our sermon passage John 1:1-18 and 20:19-23. Join me in the reading of our gospel passage for today.

(1)In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2)He was in the beginning with God. (3)All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being (4)in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. (5)The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (6)There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. (7)He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. (8)He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. (9)The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. (10)He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. (11)He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. (12)But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, (13)who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. (14)And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (15)(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") (16)From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (17)The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (18)No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. John 1:1-18 NRSV

(19)When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." (20)After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (21)Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (22)When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. (23)If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." John 20:19-23 NRSV

No matter how deep and vast the darkness is, it will never be able to overpower the light that is Christ Jesus. Even the darkness of sin and death could not hold him. Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, has overcome those powers. **The disciples were locked in a room, afraid, and in need of the light as well.** The disciples lacked hope. Their friend—the supposed Messiah—had just died, and they had witnessed it firsthand. They also feared for their lives because of their relationship to Jesus. They had reason to fear both the Roman political leaders who could kill them as insurrectionists, and also the Jewish religious leaders who would view them as blasphemous: Herod was a jealous king who didn’t want any competition; Pontius Pilate was in the pocket of the government, which was why he wanted so badly to remove himself from association with Jesus; Caiaphas, the Jewish chief priest, would view those following after a “fake” Messiah as blasphemous and worthy of death.

All of these challenges are added to the fact that they lived in a difficult world already. The Jewish people lived under the thumb of Roman rule, and life in general was hard for everyone back then: women often died in childbirth, and small infections led to death. Simple survival in the first century took a lot of time, work, and energy. The disciples were living in darkness, without hope, with grief, wondering if everything they believed was wrong, and feeling as if there were no future. Everything felt like darkness for the disciples. Jesus had been their hope. They had thought he would save them from the trials of the world and free them from political oppression. Instead, they watched him die a shameful death on a cross. Jesus had given them hope for religion, but now they feared the religious leaders who saw them as blasphemous heretics. Instead of peace, hope, joy, love, and light, everything felt dark. The smell of death was all around them.

Then Jesus—the Light—showed up. Jesus didn’t wait for them to move past their fear on their own; instead, he went to them. He found them where they were, in the midst of their fear and questions, showing up in the middle of a locked room. He brought the light into the darkness because he *is* the Light. Light overcame darkness through death and resurrection. The resurrected Jesus pronounced peace over them. He did not question or condemn their fear. Instead he embraced them and delivered words of comfort and shalom over them.

**The disciples—locked in their fear, locked in the darkness—needed to see once again that Jesus was the Light. They needed to embrace anew the reality of the incarnate God, the Messiah.** In a poetic way, John 1 reveals the beauty and power of a God who draws near to be with us. The Word (Jesus) was in the beginning. With words, creation was brought into being from nothing. There is an image of the Spirit hovering over the waters. John 1 is an important beginning place because God is three in one but also because, if we don’t grasp that Jesus *is* God, then the magnitude of the incarnation is reduced. Jesus Christ is referred to as both Word and Light in this text. Word at creation means he is not separated from the Creator God but is the same as Creator God. Creation was created with words. The use of the same word is not an accident here but further emphasizes that Jesus is God and was with God in the beginning.

Light is an image of overcoming darkness, which is important because of the nature of light. Darkness is nothing but the absence of light. Darkness can not overcome light because it is defined solely by its relationship *to* light. Light dispels darkness. The Light came; the Word made his dwelling among us. Jesus did not stay enthroned but instead became human. It matters that Jesus put on flesh because it means that he fully knew what it was to be human, and it meant that God wanted to be close to humanity. God did not wait for humanity to come to God. Instead, God went to humanity in the incarnation. When we talk about Easter, and we think about the creeds, we go as far as to say that “he descended into hell.” This is important because there is no distance Jesus wouldn’t go for the sake of humanity. Jesus *desires* to be with us. Jesus brought light into the world when he came. He defeated the darkness of sin and death through his resurrection.

The fulfillment of light in the world will come at the fulfillment of the kingdom of God when Christ returns. **As people who also know darkness, who are often locked in places of fear and weighed down with our own grief, pain, and sorrow, we also need to be reminded that the Light has come into the world.** It’s easy to look around at all the darkness and be overwhelmed. Our world has a lot of darkness. Poverty: what can one person do against such a huge problem? Disease: we have seen this one take loved ones all over the world this past year. Racism: we’ve watched people cry out in pain and anger over how this sin has impacted them. Despair: what can we do to help people battle darkness in their hearts? Pollution: how can one person do anything that helps make the world a better place to play, breathe, and enjoy?

There are more: many impact our own homes, neighborhoods, and communities. In the midst of these crushing darknesses, we cannot forget that the Light has come! Jesus did not stay enthroned in heaven but came to earth to live among broken people drowning in darkness. The hope and joy of the incarnation is not something to be left in Christmas carols it is a message of hope and joy for all time. Because light came into the world, the kingdom of God broke into the world, and we can see glimpses of this kingdom even now: While it might seem impossible to eradicate the darkness of the world and the issues it faces, there are stories of people doing incredible things for others. When we see good, loving, gracious things going on, we know the Holy Spirit is at work.

We can be reminded when we see goodness that the Light has come. The incarnation wasn’t just for the shepherds, the angels. The incarnation wasn’t just for Mary, or Joseph. The incarnation wasn’t just for the disciples hiding in a room. The incarnation is for us. Whatever darkness we are facing, Jesus is there with us. There is nothing that we face that we face alone. We serve a God who is well acquainted with grief and we serve a God who is with us through all of it. The line in the Apostles’ Creed about descending into hell means that Jesus goes into all the hells of our lives as well. He joins us in our suffering. He is with us in the darkness. He is seeking to bring light. Jesus declares peace over us in the midst of our darkness, just like he declared peace over the disciples. Jesus’s declaration of peace is a way to bring light into darkness. Shalom is a message of complete wholeness and well-being. This message of peace is light in dark times.

**As people of the resurrection, we are also people of the light. We then are sent into the world to share the light of Christ with those around us.** Jesus commissions the disciples at the end of John 20 to go out into the world. This is a commission for us as well. Those of us who have encountered the peace of Christ are to go into the world and be peacemakers. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. As the children of God (mentioned in John 1), we are to be peacemakers in the world around us. What places in our world need peace? What are ways we can be actively engaged in peacemaking in the world? Those of us who have encountered the light of Christ are to illuminate the world. We are to be a city on a hill, illuminating the darkness for everyone to see. What places in our world need light? What are ways we can be actively engaged in illuminating the darkness?

The kingdom of God is now and not yet. Jesus ushered in the kingdom of God with his incarnation, which means the kingdom of God is at work in our world now. Where do we see the kingdom of God at work? How can we participate in the work? The resurrection frees us from the power of sin and death, it frees us from the darkness, and it empowers us to live in peace. This is good news for the children of God and for the world!

This isn’t a typical Easter text, but it is a message we need. There is light in the midst of the darkness of our lives, and his name is Jesus. There is peace for us, where we are, no matter the darkness, because God left the throne of heaven in humility to enter into humanity. He suffered and died on the cross, and he descended into hell, joining with us in all the hells we experience. Ultimately he rose again, conquering the power of sin and death, conquering the darkness.

This is good news for those of us who know darkness. There is light for the world too. Jesus came into the midst of the darkness to be the light and to dispel the darkness. It is good news for a world that knows darkness, and we get to join in the work of sharing light in the world. We get to look the darkness of our world in its face and dispel it with love, with grace, and with the light that is Jesus.