

December 5, 2007

Psalm 97 John 1:1-18

We gather tonight praying with even more urgency, “Come Lord Jesus. Fill us with your light. After hearing reports on the radio and TV, another apparently random, yet deliberate act of violence, an effort to spread darkness and hopelessness and fear in this world, our hearts ache. We are filled with questions of why and how could this happen? We are filled with anger and sorrow for those families who will be receiving police on their doorstep or phone calls with news that their loved ones will not be coming home.

How can we boldly pray for light, when darkness seems to keep creeping forward with every bullet shot, bomb exploding, and addiction or depression or hatred taking a grip upon people’s lives?

Turn out the lights. All of them.

The Gospel of John boldly begins not with the Christmas story, but with these words of confession of faith, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

We have the eternal flame and the first candle of our Advent wreath. Not much, but can you still see? A couple flickers in this big dark space, yet they hold darkness back.

Or I don't know about you, but I love to camp out mostly because of the campfires at night, when everyone gathers for warmth and light from the fire. At first it rages, but then as the wood burns down, it is mesmerizing to watch the embers glow. With a blow of breath and a well placed log, you can cause fire to erupt again, even from what seems to be the darkest ember. Keep this image in mind as I share the following reflection from the novel, *Gilead*.

The main character is a pastor and he reflects on one of his past sermons for Pentecost, "It has seemed to me sometimes as though the Lord breathes on this poor ember of Creation and it turns to radiance – for a moment or a year or the span of a life. And then it sinks back into itself again, and to look at it no one would know it had anything to do with fire, or light. ... But the Lord is more constant and far more extravagant than [this illustration] seems to imply. Wherever you turn your eyes the world can shine like transfiguration. You don't have to bring a thing to it except a little willingness to see. Only, who could have the courage to see it?"¹

¹ Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2004) pg. 245

Right now the ember of Creation seems to have burned pretty low ... it is feeling pretty cold and lifeless. But, I would argue that it has more to do with our vision, than it has to do with the power of God's light. Some would say in seeing a baby in a manger that it was impossible for God to do much through one so small, so helpless, so vulnerable. We could leave tonight and rightly name vast places, people, and acts of darkness ... they are easy to see ... or we could leave with a prayer on our lips, Come Lord Jesus. Fill us with your Light, so we might go with a willingness see.

It takes courage to speak of things that are overlooked. It takes courage to trust and support what looks impossible. It takes courage to see where God is blowing embers back into life. But, that is what God is doing this evening with words of comfort, the Red Cross, outstretched hands, hugs, able surgeon's hands, quick action and work from police and emergency crews, and much more. God our Emmanuel, is with us and blowing in among God's people to push back the darkness that seems so large and consuming tonight.

Yes, this is the Word we need to turn to tonight ... the Word who from the beginning was with God and was 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 life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

Jesus be our light today. Amen.