

Light in Darkness

A homily preached by Jennifer A. Hudson at the Celtic Eucharist, St. Paul's on the Green Episcopal Church, Norwalk, CT, December 22, 2016

Revelation 22: 1-5 and John 1:1-5

Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives rest in you, o God: Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen. (adapted from Night Prayer from the *New Zealand Prayer Book*)

The midwinter festival of Yule, revived from its indigenous Germanic forms and today celebrated by modern Pagans, commemorates the winter solstice. It's an important turning point in the Wheel of the Year as it marks the longest night. For many modern celebrants, the solstice represents a time for spiritual and personal introspection. However, it is also a time of anticipating and planning for the future. From this point forward daylight will increase. The sun, in a sense, will be reborn, returning in longer increments to give life to sleeping, frozen soil. The increase won't be noticeable at first, but the promise of longer and warmer days remains present. Darkness will not overcome light.

The theme makes its echoes in our own celebration of the birth of Christ. Consider how John's Gospel opens: "What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it." As John proclaims the mystery of the Creator becoming the Created, there's the recognition of Jesus as Word made flesh, a lifegiving light to triumph over a dark world. Christmas is a time to celebrate the birth of God both with us and within as we renew our commitment to shining Christ's light wherever and with whomever we are.

That's not an easy feat when the world, to quote the 1986 Genesis song, remains a "land of confusion" with "too many men, too many people, making too many problems, and not much love to go round." Unfortunately, in 2016, the world is still confused. A Muslim woman wearing the hijab is shoved down a flight of steps in a New York City subway station. An interracial couple in Ohio returns to a house destroyed from the inside out by vandals. Indigenous peoples in the Dakotas sustain injuries from rubber bullets while protecting their land and water. Civilians are slaughtered in Aleppo. A truck plows into a

crowd at a Christmas market in Berlin. With events like these it becomes far too easy to lose hope that better days are ahead. But we must trust that they are. We must plan for them. For, to quote Eleanor Roosevelt, "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."

Darkness is not dark to God but is as bright as day (Psalm 139). Darkness is where the light can shine. Barbara Brown Taylor claims in her book *Learning to Walk in the Dark* that it is where God makes God's presence known. Let's tap into that presence. Let's awaken. Let's light our candles and plan how each of us might be beacons of God's all-inclusive, unconditional love in a confused and hurting world. Doing so requires faith that, in God-with-us, "there will be no more night" and we will "need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be [our] light" (Revelation 22:5). Better days *are* ahead. Will you join me in trusting in and making them?