

“God’s Light Within”
Psalm 19 John 2:13-22
Third Sunday in Lent, Year B, March 7, 2021
First Presbyterian Church, Sandpoint, Idaho
Andy Kennaly, Pastor

One of my friends lives in Canada and posted a photo on Facebook of the Northern Lights in a winter sky dance over the flat plains of Alberta just north of Calgary. Rays of green hues streak like a cosmic chandelier; band after band fill the sky with the light of Aurora Borealis. The rest of the sky has dark tones of deep blues and black, pierced by stars and planets and a spiral arm of Milky Way star dust. One of the most amazing things about the Northern Lights is how few people actually see them. Most people are asleep when the night sky is at it’s peak. Because we’re unconscious, we miss the revelation when all we have to do is wake up, open our eyes, show up, step outside, and look up, invite God to speak in the depths of our soul.

St. Francis of Assisi and Franciscan spirituality, Thomas Aquinas, and others, teach that nature is the first Bible. Long before written words, for hundreds of thousands of years, even millions and billions, the Earth as a living system expresses God as Christ creates all things. Psalm 19 reflects this, the sky tells of God’s glory and the Earth proclaims God’s handiwork. Even time

itself is in on the revelation as day and night pour forth speech and declare knowledge. The sky, the Earth itself, all day and all night; in other words, everything is covered and included. God's glory, action and activity are all-encompassing, ever-present, patient, and pervasive.

The Psalmist is not ignorant, knowing that as wonderful, glorious, and joyful the LORD's law, precepts, commandments, ordinances, and awe may be, bringing enlightenment, righteousness, rejoicing, and wisdom, in ways that time cannot limit, there is still need of warning. "Who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults." The only way to seek the light of splendor in the sky is by stepping into the darkness. We need to face our shadow. Things hidden may trip us up if we're not aware, guided by deeper perceptions and vision. Shadow work is part of a faithful life. It's very difficult, but without shadow work, God's living presence in our soul is obscured, and we fool ourselves with delusions.

In 1 Corinthians 6:19, we read, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?" It seems most people do not really believe that God lives within them, and that our body is a temple, holy and wonderfully made. Otherwise, we wouldn't abuse it, we

would be content to take care of it. We wouldn't carry shame or guilt, or store in our very cells traumatic storylines of pain and suffering. These take up space within us, and project pain buried alive. It seems most people don't see God who lives in others, otherwise Christ's call to love our enemies would make more sense as self-defined boundaries would dissolve as we realize there is no other for all are one in Christ. To see God in the Earth, Christ in all things, instills reverence and inner connection for the non-human Earthlings with whom we share this planet. We become less inclined to view created beings as objects to think about and use for ourselves.

In the fourth century, the theologian, Augustine, reminds us of this core biblical teaching, as he says, "God's temple is holy, and you are that temple: all you who believe in Christ and whose belief makes you love him.... Real belief in Christ means love of Christ: it is not the belief of the demons who believed without loving and therefore despite their belief said: What do you want with us, Son of God?... No; let our belief be full of love for him we believe in, so that instead of saying: What do you want with us, we may rather say: We belong to you, you have redeemed us.... All who believe in this way are like the living stones which go to build God's temple, and like the rot-proof timber

used in the framework of the ark which the flood waters could not submerge. It is in this temple, that is, in ourselves, that prayer is addressed to God and heard. . . . (–Augustine 354-430, Expositions on the Psalms, <http://edgeofenclosure.org/lent3b.html>)

It seems like when we look up and see the Northern Lights, if we allow them to inspire us, one of the reasons they do is because they take us to a deeper level in our own spirit, they resonate with ancient truths etched into our genetic code. They are a colorful and lovely way to experience humility in just the right balance. Humility that reminds us there is more to life than meets the eye; Benevolence holds us and all things in God’s care. If we forget this love of Christ too long, a sort of corruption crusts over like the staining of silver platters exposed and neglected too long. We put our trust in the corruption, it feels like security, when really it’s a projection of our shadows, which actually tarnishes, from within, the gifts of God all around us.

In John we read of Jesus who cleanses the Temple, enacts social justice to help the poor reclaim the Temple Court as a place of prayer for the Gentiles who seek God’s presence. Dan Clendenin says in his essay, “Subtle as a Sledge Hammer: Jesus ‘Cleanses’ the Temple,” that we are like those money changers who seek security at the expense of others and our own spiritual health. He

says, “I read the cleansing of the temple as a stark warning against any and every false sense of security. Misplaced allegiances, religious presumption, pathetic excuses, smug self-satisfaction, spiritual complacency, nationalist zeal, political idolatry, and economic greed in the name of God are only some of the tables that Jesus would overturn in his own day and in ours.”

(Dan Clendenin, *Subtle as a Sledge Hammer: Jesus “Cleanses” the Temple*

March 19, 2006, <http://www.journeywithjesus.net/Essays/20060313JJ.shtml>

from <http://edgeofenclosure.org/lent3b.html>)

Jesus claims the Temple as nothing less than his body. In an archetypal way, as John shares about Jesus, he’s speaking of Christ, and in sharing Christ, we learn about ourselves, for we are also temples of the Holy Spirit, created beings animated by the power of Love, connected with our ever-present origin, God, in the depths of our life, we are hidden with Christ in God.

One person who illustrates this power of love within us, able to stay centered in the present within this holy Presence, is Esther (Etty) Hillesum, a young, Jewish woman from Amsterdam whose diaries during the German occupation anticipate her death at Auschwitz in 1943. In one of her letters, titled *An Interrupted Life*, she confesses, saying, “Dear God, these are anxious times. Tonight for the first time I lay in the dark with burning eyes as scene

after scene of human suffering passed before me. I shall promise You one thing, God, just one very small thing: I shall never burden my today with cares about my tomorrow, although that takes some practice. Each day is sufficient unto itself. I shall try to help You, God, to stop my strength ebbing away, though I cannot vouch for it in advance. But one thing is becoming increasingly clear to me: that You cannot help us, that we must help You to help ourselves, and that is all we can manage these days and also all that really matters: that we safeguard that little piece of You, God, in ourselves. And perhaps in others as well. Alas, there doesn't seem to be much You Yourself can do about our circumstances, about our lives. Neither do I hold You responsible. You cannot help us, but we must help You and defend Your dwelling place inside us to the last. There are, it is true, some who, even at this late stage, are putting their vacuum cleaners and silver forks and spoons in safekeeping instead of guarding You, dear God. An there are those who want to put their bodies in safekeeping but who are nothing more now than a shelter for a thousand fears and bitter feelings. And they say, 'I shan't let them get me into their clutches.' But they forget that no one is in their clutches who is in Your arms. I am beginning to feel a little more peaceful, God, thanks to this

conversation with You. I shall have many more conversations with you. You are sure to go through lean times with me now and then, when my faith weakens a little. But believe me, I shall always labor for You and remain faithful to You and I shall never drive You from my presence. ...” (-Etty Hillesum 1914-1943, An Interrupted Life)

This young woman recognizes God in her own soul, God in the soul of others, and God in all the world. She claims responsibility to take care of God’s dwelling place, to protect it from the clutches of anything less than God’s very presence. She values the gift of life and the tremendous work it takes to live well, and seeks to help God through compassion and practice.

May we too explore ways to share compassion with the world, much of which is asleep, unconscious to the glory of God’s presence who permeates all things seen and unseen. May we help God to help us and others, to live into the reality of grace-filled love. May we be gifted with humility in just the right balance, to humble our pride and calm our fears, and courageously face our own shadows. May we transform our pain rather than transmit it, and find through steady disciplines of prayer God’s word shared without speech, the voice of heaven and earth going out through all there is. May our minds be

renewed, as we unlearn to learn in order to perceive through our hearts and enlightened eyes God's Love. In this Lenten journey through the holy temple of our bodies to the core of our soul, may God's humble and vulnerable love be glorified, both now and forever. Amen.

(Many quotes shared from Suzanne Guthrie, Edge of Enclosure, <http://edgeofenclosure.org/lent3b.html>)

Facebook Post:



Jake & Kate, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, 2021