

First Sunday after Christmas
John 1:1-18

“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.”

There are two ways to interpret John’s words.
How we interpret them will determine
who we know God to be,
how we see the world around us,
and how we live life.

The first way is to look around and see a world filled with darkness.
To believe that there are patches of light here and there
but not much more than a flashlight or a candle
illuminating a dark room.

To live in fear that the light of the flashlight or the candle is
always in danger of going out and will leave us in the darkness.
To think that God is sometimes here, sometimes not.
And that equal powers of good and evil are duking it out and
the final outcome is still undecided.

The other way to read,

“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.”

Is the Gospel way, the way of the Good News.

The Good News acknowledges that there is bad news in the world.
The Good News acknowledges that there is darkness in the world.
If anyone who walked the earth knew about darkness it was Jesus.

He stared evil in the face, rebuked it, walked through it,
and was victorious over it.

The Good News is that the darkness is not overwhelming the small light,
but just the opposite.

The light of Christ can be seen everywhere if we have eyes to see
and we can live as children of the light
if we are willing to let the light we have received shine through.

The light shined brightly through a woman named Louise Degrafinfried
one spring day in 1984.

Louise was 70 years old and she lived in the small town of Mason, TN.
One morning, when she was cleaning her little house,
she heard a knock at her front door.

When she answered it, she found a terrible looking man
standing there pointing a gun at her.
“Open up”, he whispered. And so she let him inside.

He looked the house over to make sure no one else was there and
she looked him over as well.

He was dirty and smelly with matted hair.
He had escaped from the state prison and was on the run
and according to the authorities, a very dangerous man.
She had heard about him on the local news the night before.

After looking at him for a long time, she said, “Are you hungry?”
He looked at her as if she was crazy. “What?”
“Are you hungry”, she asked.
“Yeah, I am.”

“Well”, she said, “come on into the kitchen, and sit down.
I’m gonna fix you some bacon and eggs.
Before I do though, I want you to get yourself down that hall
to the bathroom and wash your face and hands.
You look terrible.

The escaped prisoner was dumbfounded.
But he went down the hall to the bathroom
while Mrs. Degrafinfried began to prepare the bacon and eggs.

When he came back she looked him over and said,
 “Well, you look a whole lot better.
 Now, put your gun down, it’s making me nervous.”
And he did.

She began to talk to him as he ate.
She talked to him about
 her little Mt. Sinai Missionary Baptist church
 and about Jesus and how he had made such a difference in her life.
She talked to him about how God loved everybody
 and didn’t want any of his children breaking into people’s houses
 and scaring the wits out of them.

She asked about his family and told him about her family.
He said she reminded him of his grandmother
 who had died when he was eight years old.
They talked some more about Jesus.

And when he had finished his bacon and eggs, he did the strangest thing.
He picked up the telephone and called the police and gave himself up.

When the police came, Mrs. Degrafinfried walked with him outside.
As the police were about to take him away,
 she reached over and patted his cheek, and said,
 “Now you be good, you hear?”

Christmas tells us of the Great Story of the birth of our Savior.
John tells us this morning that the Great Story continues
 from the birth of the Messiah,
 to rebirth for us who receive him into our life.
We move from spectators, standing in awe at a distance looking
 in on the manger
to becoming a part of the new creation God is giving birth to
 within us and in all of Creation.

John tells us,
 “to all who received him, who believed in his name,
 he gave power to become children of God, who were born,
 not of blood or of the will of the flesh
 or of the will of man, but of God.”

Louise Degrafinfried received and believed in Jesus,
became a child of God and because of that,
was able to see the escaped prisoner as a child of God,
and treated him as a child of God.

She refused to let the darkness instill fear in her
or dictate her actions.

The light of Christ within her that became bright and strong
through years of faithful living,
was there when she needed to draw guidance
and strength and courage from it.

And the light of Christ overcame the darkness.
Not with violence or coercion but with the power of Christ
working through her.

John tells us

“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.”

Jesus came from the heart of God
to make the Father know to us.

Because only in seeing our Maker will be truly become fully human.
For in seeing our Creator, we catch a glimpse of what we
were intended to be.

And we catch a glimpse of what other people are intended to be.
Children of God.

When we live as children of God, we will walk in his light.
And the darkness will not overcome it.