

## Walk in the Light



From the first letter of John:

*If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)*

What does it mean to “walk in the light?” In the darkened sanctuary at the Great Vigil of Easter, the Paschal Candle is lit as the people pray: “O God, through your Son you have bestowed upon your people the brightness of your light.” The newly lit candle is walked through the church to song: “The Light of Christ. Thanks be to God.” (BCP 285) From that one candle, the whole church is soon bright with the Easter light.

Eastertide is awash in light. The light of the Paschal Candle. The white of the altar decorations and these vestments. The sweet white flowers that bring a longed for Spring into a sanctuary gloomy for too long in this season of pandemic.

The Great Vigil starts in darkness. For the disciples too, Easter began in the dark of evening. In a locked room. In fear for their lives. Several of them have seen an empty tomb, but don’t understand what it means. Did someone take the body? Will they now stand accused and face Jesus’ fate?

Compounding the disciples’ fear was the sick feeling among many of them that in his hour of greatest need, they had abandoned their Lord, their friend who loved them beyond measure. The world they thought they knew was broken, seemingly beyond repair.

Through their fear and brokenness, they find Jesus standing among them. “Peace be with you,” he says. Not once, but twice. For their fear is great. But so is the peace. As they begin to absorb the reality of Jesus’ crucified, corporal presence in their midst, their fear melts away as they experience the “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.” (Phil 4:4). Fear gives way to peace. Peace breaks out into rejoicing. Darkness gives way to light.

And there is still more going on in that locked house. Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit into the disciples, empowering them, commissioning them, to proclaim the forgiveness of sins. They are not to just bask in the light. They are to walk in it, bringing its Good News into a world that has been gloomy for far too long.

John makes clear in his letter that it is by the blood of Christ that we are forgiven. “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:2) For reasons perhaps found deep in childhood catechism classes or some old Cecil B. DeMille movie, this atoning sacrifice of the cross got associated with the notion that God was so angry at us that only the death of his son could appease him.

But the cross is not about God's anger. It's about God's mercy. The word "atonement" is not a fancy theological term. It simply means "at-one-ment." The greatest act of love, God shedding his own blood for us, reconciles the whole world. Makes us one.

At the heart of our faith is the bright certainty of being loved and forgiven beyond measure. The very core of the truth of Christ's death and resurrection is the forgiveness of sins. Christ forgiving us. You and me forgiving each other. *"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."* This is the *"new covenant of reconciliation"* that Christ empowers the disciples to proclaim.

When the disciples received the Holy Spirit, the very breath of the risen Christ, they were transformed from a fearful cohort into a new Church, a fellowship of forgiven and loved sinners, walking in the light by bearing witness across the entire, broken world to Christ's healing forgiveness.

The power of the Resurrection is the greatest of all miracles. The doors of the locked house of that Easter night were flung open as the formerly fearful disciples walked out to boldly proclaim the forgiveness of sins in Christ. Today's reading from The Acts of the Apostles recounts the *"great power"* of the apostles' testimony and the *"great grace upon them all."*

The community of believers exemplified God's light and love. They *"were of one heart and soul,"* lovingly sharing out of their abundance so that no one was in need. This idyllic vision of a beloved community has seeded human imagination across the centuries.

Having received the *"one baptism for the forgiveness of sins,"* we too have been made members of this miraculous Church, this beloved community described in Acts. As part of this fellowship, we too are called to walk in the light. Not just bask in it.

In fact, it's by walking that we become a fellowship. We become a Church by forgiving each other in love, and bringing Christ's forgiveness, his at-one-ment, to our broken and suffering communities. Perhaps even, as Acts describes, giving out of our privileged abundance so that there is not a needy person among us.

Well. The idealistic psalmist might sing, *"Oh, how good and pleasant it is, when brethren live together in unity!"* (Psalm 133:1) But the realist in me says this is crazy.

Learning how to walk in the light is a tall order. The theologian Jim Wallis describes how we often let our sociology, the ways we've come to understand how the world "really" works, to filter our theology, what we understand to be the ways of God. The resurrection calls us to turn that back around. Allow our theology to transform our sociology. Let God's forgiveness in Christ, let God's love, become the reality that rules our hearts, our minds and our hands.

Wallis notes that over sixty years ago, The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King allowed his theology to transform his sociology. The result was the blossoming of the vision of the Beloved Community. Although some things have changed since then, much remains to be done to make real the vision of a beloved community, that amazing Church of Acts that is of *"one heart and soul."* Where all *"brethren live together in unity."* Dr. King's words seemed particularly relevant for today's message about the truth of the Resurrection and walking in the light. He said:

*The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opponents into friends. It is this type of understanding goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men.*

My sisters and brothers, it's Easter. And we have been breathed on by Jesus. Let us walk together in the light. By our love and forgiveness, let us become miracles in the hearts of all.

Alleluia, the Lord is risen! The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!