

Shine Like A Star

Sermon December 2, 2018

Take a moment and picture a star. Imagine it, see it shining in the sky.

Now imagine a dark sky filled with stars – in the middle of a field, in the middle of the countryside, the dark sky illuminated with a multitude of stars. There are so many that your eyes cannot even take them all in.

Keep this image in your mind during the whole sermon please.

Stars are a common metaphor in the Bible. The most famous star, was the star that led the Wise men, the Magi to Jesus.

Approximately 3,000 years ago, a man named Abram was praying in his tent. One night, he was not able to sleep because he was very unhappy. In his prayer, he turned to the Lord and complained to God that he and his beloved wife Sarai were childless. In response, God took Abram outside into the dark night and said, “Look up toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” As Abram looked up, he was awed at the canopy of stars shimmering overhead. “So many shall your descendants be. . .” Abram was told.

I think, to Abram, it seemed that it was a crazy promise because Abram and his wife Sarai were very old, far beyond child bearing years. God wanted to make sure that Abram would take His word seriously. For this, the Lord said to Abram, “In order to convince you that my promise will come true, I will change your name and your wife’s name. Your name is Abram, but from now your name is Abraham, Abraham, which means “father of a multitude” – and Sarai became Sarah – “mother of nations” – and your descendants will go to all parts of the world.” Today, people of Jewish, Muslim and Christian faiths all trace their stories back to Abraham and Sarah.

Let’s go back and think about the stars again for a minute.

Stars are incredibly far away from us. A star’s light takes many hundred years to travel and be seen by us. It takes more than four years for the light from Alpha Centauri, the nearest star to us, to reach Earth. So, when we look up at the expanse of stars, what we’re really seeing is light from the past, light that started its journey hundreds of years earlier, and today we are admiring them. Today they make us happy; today they lighten up our hearts with their light.

The Old Testament scripture we heard today talks about stars. We heard from the book of Daniel that “Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

The book of Daniel was written for Hebrews who were living in exile. In Daniel’s time, Jerusalem had been invaded and the people were removed from their homeland to serve foreign powers; they were oppressed, persecuted, and were losing almost all hope, and even losing touch with God. Daniel’s visions and words were meant to bring hope. He encouraged them to persevere through the darkness, to hold onto their Jewish faith and be true to God, even in exile. The exile would last generations, but the way they live in exile, the way they keep their faith, would shine like stars, for generations to come. Their faith would encourage the next generation to be faithful to God, and would give them strength and hope.

Paul had a similar message from his prison in Rome to the Christians of Philippi in Greece, when he said: “Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish . . . in which you shine like stars in the world.” Philippians 2:15

Dear beloved, we are all children of God, and if we fulfill our mission in this world we are stars. Stars who light up the dark sky in a cold winter night, stars who lead people closer to Jesus Christ, stars who are admired because of the light they spread all over in this world.

Today, our Lord is encouraging us: “My child, shine brightly, shine brightly!”

Jesus often was surrounded by people. Some of them were fishermen, tax collectors, or others, so called sinners. He always encouraged his followers with the same message: You are God’s child. You are created to shine.

His disciples were not perfect. They had their own issues as well as we all have ours, but once Jesus saw not what they were at that moment but how the Holy Spirit would transform them. Jesus said to them: “You are the light of the world.” (Matthew 5:14-16)

Can you imagine their response? They must have thought Jesus was a little crazy. But Jesus was not crazy, he just had vision. When he looked at the disciples, he could see that his light reflected in their eyes. “I am the light of the world,” he says. “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”.

And “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

Jesus taught his disciples again and again, with his words and actions, how to be that light: by sharing the word of God and living out their faith through acts and love and grace. Jesus reminded his followers not to hide their light under a basket, but to let their light shine.

And after the Holy Spirit came upon them and filled their hearts, they started to shine, and they shone to their very last breaths, to their very last heartbeats. Jesus’ disciples fanned out across the world, spreading Christ’s gospel and shining Christ’s light. Peter carried the gospel west to Rome, the centre of political and economic power. Thomas carried the gospel east to India. Andrew carried the gospel to the region north of the Black Sea, where to this day he is known as the patron saint of Russia.

One by one, two by two, on foot and on horseback, by ship and by carriage, in synagogues and in prisons, in royal courts and courts of law, in the privacy of homes and in street corners and market places, they told the story of Jesus; and the light spread, shining for all to see.

Light we still see today – shining like stars.

We should never forget that the stars are getting their light from the Sun and they just reflect the sun’s light. They spread the light they received from the sun. Our call is to be close to our Lord Jesus Christ, and to reflect His love, His patience, His mercy and to pass all these things to others.

That’s legacy.

As God’s children, we too are the light of the world, because our lives shine with the light of the one who is the light of the world. Not only during this Advent and Christmas time, but always. During this Season especially, we have to share that light by sharing the word of God and living our faith through the simple acts of love and grace we do for each other.

Legacy is about how we live our lives to shine the light of God – today and into the future.

Investing in God’s Church it is a great way that we can shine like stars, because that will sustain this church for the next generation in the years to come, and this church will be open for them in decades because today you were generous and you

invested in God's work. And your legacy, your support for Calvin will shine in decades as well. You may not see the results here on this earth, but you will receive them back from God in His glory. There are ways of investing in the future of the church so that Christ's light can continue to shine long after we're gone.

Anyone can leave a legacy. When we live our faith through acts of love and grace, Christ's light will shine.

We can give gifts of time, talent and treasure. Please don't forget, that any gift, given with great love in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, can make a big difference in other peoples' lives. God's love will shine through the big and little things we do, like the stars in the night sky. Amen.

(The main body of the 2018 Legacy Sunday worship resource was written by Lori Guenther Reesor and Karen Plater, with inspiration from the Rev. Herb Gale.)