

We Are Marching in the Light of God **John 1:1-5, 10-18**

The first Sunday of 2022

Happy New Year! A new year has dawned. Did you see the first sunrise yesterday? Me neither. I am a night owl, not an early bird, so I rarely see the sunrise. Many years ago, I wanted to see the first sunrise of the new year, so I traveled to the east coast of Korea with my friends after the watch night service. It was a freezing day, so I bundled up and went to the beach.

Before the sunrise, everything seemed dark and gray. All I could feel was biting wind, and all I could hear was the rumbling sound of the waves. But as the sun was coming up, it cast away the darkness. The darkness retreated as the sunlight broke through, and the sun painted the ocean with soft orange strokes. The sunlight gradually filled the winter air with comforting warmth. Watching a sunrise over the ocean was beautiful and magical. This stunning beauty of the sunrise over the ocean draws thousands of people each year. Many people pray for good luck as they meet the first sunrise of the new year. Of course, I didn't see the first sunrise this year, but I pray that God blesses the Asbury family in this new year and continues to walk with our beloved Asbury church. I also pray that we walk in the light of God in this new year!

Uncertainty

While we pray for a brighter and better new year, we are also mature enough to know that "tomorrow will bring its own worries." Honestly, no one knows what tomorrow will bring. Some say, "The only thing certain in life is uncertainty." Will Covid-19 end in 2022? We hope so, but we don't know. Will the economy get better in 2022? We hope so, but we don't know. Will the stock market crash in 2022? We hope not, but we don't know yet. Will donkeys and elephants ever stop their political war and work together for the common good in 2022? We hope so, but we don't know. Because of the complexity and the uncertainty of life, we often feel like we are walking in the woods in the dark of night. We need light. We need the true light that helps us to see the reality of the world as it is. We also need a light that guides us in the right direction.

Have you ever gone hiking at night? When I was 18 years old, my family once went hiking on a high mountain in Korea, which is as tall as Mount Washington. The trail typically takes about 13 hours to complete. We planned to stay one night in a hut at the top of the mountain. We didn't plan for night hiking, but we brought two small headlamps just in case. We started around 1 p.m. and reached the hut by the evening.

Unfortunately, people were already packed in the hut, and there was no space for us. So my father decided we should hike down. It soon got dark after sunset. All we had were two small headlamps. Back then, we didn't have bright LED headlamps. I don't know how my father could find the correct direction with his dim headlamp. The lamp was not bright enough to dispel the darkness around us, but it was bright enough to help us discern the terrain and find trail signs on the dark mountain. We slowly made our way down the mountain, and around 4 a.m., we could see the light from another hut at the far end of the trail. The light from the hut guided us in the right direction. While I don't recommend unplanned night hiking, I have learned one thing. A small light is enough to navigate our way forward in the darkness. As we live through 2022, we will encounter the darkness of uncertainty and complexity. All we need is light that can help us see where we are and show us where to go. The good news is that we already have this light within us.

Jesus, the true light of the world, is in us, so tend the fire

The Gospel of John says Jesus Christ is the light of all people. All who receive him and believe in his name become the children of God, and the true light remains in them. The holy flame that cast away the darkness is already in us, and as we move through 2022, Jesus Christ, the light of the world, will continue to be with us. Amen? Since this divine flame is already within us, we need to tend the fire in us. How? Through prayer!

Prayer is a spiritual practice to tend our inner fire. It is a spiritual act of intentionally engaging with Christ, the true light, to see ourselves and the world. As we pray, we simply sit in silence to create space in which we see ourselves and the world through the eyes of the Son. It reveals how we have been estranged from God and broken, while at the same time, how we are still beloved by Christ. This experience of God's love transforms how we see others. The prayer of St. Clare, a cloistered nun, beautifully describes this change.

Love enfolds / It is no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me.
I am secure in the Lord. / I can look out, now, through the Lord's eyes.
I can see the world as He created it, in His mercy,
I can see my sisters and brothers with His love,
and I can worship the Father through the eyes of the Son
in the Love of the Holy Spirit.

If we can look at the world and our neighbors through the Lord's eyes, we have no option but to love them. Throughout this year, I asked you to set aside time for prayer, which is the most important act we take for the world. I know that Asbury has many prayer warriors. But I want all of us to be people of prayer. By tending inner flames through prayer, we also can be a small light for the world and dispel the darkness in the world. Many Christians have shared the divine light in them with others and cast away the darkness of injustice and oppression in the world, even if there seemed to be no-visible change at hand.

I believe you have heard about the passing of Arch-Bishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa this week. He was an anti-apartheid leader and voice of justice. He worked for racial justice as well as racial reconciliation. He worked for more than three decades to end apartheid in South Africa. Not three years or thirteen years but more than thirty years. How could he continue his work? Because he tended the divine flame within him through prayer. He said a disciplined prayer life sustained him.¹ Through prayer, he was also able to see Jesus Christ, the true light, even in the darkness. He said, "Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness." With hope, he shared the light in him with others in the darkness of racial injustice and oppression. The glow of tiny lights, ignited by him, gradually grew and became bright enough to cast out the darkness of apartheid in South Africa. I believe this is what it means to walk in the light of Christ.

We Are Marching in the Light of God

The darkness of the world is so deep that one good person alone can't change it. We need to share the light of love and hope with people around us. Remember the Christmas Eve candlelight service. When we shared candlelight with one another, the light of our candles gradually dispelled the darkness in the sanctuary, and the warm glow of the candles filled the

¹ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/december/desmond-tutu-dies-archbishop-apartheid-south-africa.html>

church. James Keller said, “A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle.” We lose nothing by lighting the candles of hope and love in other people’s hearts. The more we share the light with others, the more the darkness of injustice and inequity retreats. We march together in the light of God and share this light with all people we meet on our life journey. Marching in the light of God means accepting the true light into our hearts and extending our love to all people and the whole of creation. How far can your light of love reach? Stretch out your arms and check how far you can reach. This is the limit of my reach, but if we hold each other’s hands, our limited reach is extended.

Tend the divine flame in you through prayer, hold each other’s hands in love, and extend your reach. One by one... as we hold each other’s hand in love and compassion, the darkness in the world retreats. We have started a new year. We don’t know what lies ahead of us, but don’t be afraid. Let us march together in the light of God. May Jesus Christ, the true light shine on you and guide your every step. God bless you. Amen.