

State College Presbyterian Church
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Light!

(Wait for music to start and count five): And God said, "Let there be /// **light**;
(music ends) and there **was** light."
Genesis 1:3

Genesis 1:1-19
John 1:1-14

Does that give you even a small sense of what the first "Let there be light" was like when it rolled through the primeval darkness and out of the void rose the contours of structured spaces.

Before the light, darkness -- only the Spirit, the wind of God hovered over the waters like an eagle hovering over its young.

Nothing but abysmal darkness until -- light.

Then with the light, the triangles, circles, waves and spirals, all the contours of creation.

Notice, when you read Genesis that the light comes **before** the sun or stars.

The light comes from God, not from the stars or the sun. The sun, moon, and stars come into the creation 10 verses later.

We scientifically-schooled people naturally assume that the sun had to appear before any light could shine. But the light is different light. The light comes from God. It is important for us to see this.

To see this light as more than the aesthetic wonder of sunsets, fireflies, campfires and stars.

For, the light of God is what reveals the **contours** of creation.

Just a few verses later the text says,

"And God saw that it (the creation – all of it) – God saw that it was good – it was very good."

Which in Hebrew has a broad meaning -- it was beautiful to the eye, had a good function, and expressed exactly what the creator had in mind; much like a craftsperson who sits back after she has finished her work and is pleased (and even a little bit surprised) how well it came out.

God had the same reaction in response to the young, light-drawn creation -- the heart of God filled with joy in its beauty, the rapture of the creator.

Of course, this is the very first thing we should hear in the text. Yet for most of us it comes as a surprise.

It is probably least of all from the Bible that we expect this proclamation of an “oooooh” about the world.

It's surprising, because everyone knows that our faith is rather sad and melancholy.

It says a lot that the sacred book we use is bound in somber black – when it is stamped with gold, besides, it looks fit for a first class funeral. And if any other color appears it is usually blood red.

Most of the people who were in seminary with me had stories to relate when friends and relatives found out they wanted to go into seminary and study theology.

“Why would you want to do that? Did you split up with Susie?”

People were surprised and said, “But Johnny is talented and enjoys life, why would he want to go to seminary?”

After all, everybody knows that religion is about sin and hell and the Last Judgment.

If you let yourself in for that kind of thing, you might just as well kiss goodbye to laughter and good times.

But here at the beginning of Genesis, it is said that God -- the very God this black book evokes -- found the world beautiful and saw it spread out before him in the hilarious brightness of morning.

Perhaps our woeful and serious worshiping faces have contributed something toward the prejudice that our faith is very sad and one must wait until the next world comes before we can get anything like a little laughter.

How many of us find in scripture or faith this message of delight in the world and revel in God's creation in pure joy?

Or are we like those who roar through the beauty of the autumn countryside at sixty or seventy miles an hour?

Do we approach the joyful creation of God like armies of tourists who disgorge from buses to look at famous sites, take digital snapshots to prove we were there, send a few postcards and then are swept up again like a giant vacuum cleaner?

If there is nothing festive and resilient in our life, if this is what the redeemed look like, how will anyone ever believe in the redeemer?

Those who will not see the joyful contours of creation through the light of God lose from their lives not only the goodness of creation but the goodness of creation's Lord.

But it does not have to be that way.

Because there is light.

God's light reveals for us the contour of creation.

And it is so good, so very, very good.

The good news of John tries to express the same thing about human beings.

Notice that John also opens with a creation: "In the Beginning was the Word" and then talks about a light that shines through the darkness -- just like the light of God -- not light from the sun or stars, but a light from the Word made flesh.

The light of the first creation is structured and bent and put into the final form of a word in the flesh.

And in him is light.

The light shines in the darkness.

In this light, what do we see?

Have you ever met a person whom you can't quite make out?

How do we try to go about seeing the contours of the person? We usually ask about their family background, where they grew up, what they do.

Science looks for the contours of an individual in the hidden ropes of genes, chromosomes, DNA

Psychology probes childhood traumas, or asks questions of birth and environment to understand the contours of a person -- as people said of Jesus, "He comes from Nazareth, hick town. Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

What we find out is that all that background is helpful, but the contours of a person still remain in the dark and not in the light.

But what if we begin to look at that person revealed in the light of God as an act of creation?

We can rejoice in the createdness, the delicacy and fragility of this person as an act of creation?

Human beings are the only ones who can see the contours of another in God's light. There is only one being in all creation who does not fit simply as an object in this light-flooded world of creation. Whose secret is somewhere else: this is humanity.

Our God is an artist of the light.

A painter is an artist who can see light and structure, twist and suffer it to show us the contours of the world in ways we have never seen them before.

Jesus Christ is an artist whose light enables us to see the contours of a human being as we have never seen them before.

The light of God showed the contours of the creation, and God looked, and saw that all was good.

The light of Christ shows the contours of human beings, and Jesus looked, and saw that all humans are our neighbor.

But the final looking is a product of our eyes and our hearts. And that's our business - to catch the joy of the light of all created things - and then, in the light of Jesus, to be able to see what is not clear, what is mostly hidden, that all people are our neighbors -- and are worthy of our love and care, just as the created world is worthy of our love and care.

It is all there to see, for those who will look through the light.

But that's the problem, isn't it.

All this is a beautiful possibility -- but the fact is that the human species has proved itself over and over to be direct flight from the light.

The Bible is a recording of how ingenious we are in escaping from the light, avoiding the light, turning away from the light, pretending that the light does not exist

John said it. "The light was in the world, and the world was made through the light, but this world knew it not."

After all, what if the light illuminates the darkness of the contours within us?

The light of Jesus the Christ, can be a terrifying and at the same time a burdensome thing to us.

If we see, allow ourselves to see, what the light reveals, we will have to see people differently from the way we did before.

Then we shall have to see them the way God and Jesus see them.

As neighbors. Whenever Jesus looked at people he saw neighbors.

O, he does not mean the person who happens to live next door.

He means people you don't have any reason to like.

They are not your family.

They are not your friends.

They are not even very likable.

But they are there – there in front of you. There in your space. There in your world.

And if we see the contours of people in the light of Jesus, no longer can we say, "If this my neighbor cannot cope with himself or with his marriage, or his finances, then let him go to welfare, or the minister, or his congressman or the advice column of the newspaper."

No, it cannot be, if that person is seen in the light of Jesus Christ, which reveals the true contours of that person.

And the contours revealed are those of neighbor.

Then all people count for a great deal.

Have you ever read the letters people send into the newspapers -- the amount of burden and pain people are carrying with them?

And yet these are always people who live around us somewhere. Who else could send those letters? But we rarely see these people – our eyes are hid from the light of seeing them.

To see clearly in the light of Christ is often a hardship.

One who knows the light of the new creation is always in a state of mobilization; always on the alert.

And this very moment, despite my weariness and full schedule, I may be detailed to follow the track of my neighbor who is in trouble.

This is what holds people back from the Christian faith and the aliveness and joy of creation -- it is the fear of being involved with another's problems and standing in the naked light of the demands of God.

Seldom is it a fear of some doctrine -- but instead the fear of going outside of ourselves.

Yet, when we take our chances – and even if we fail -- we shall see the glimmer of the real happiness that comes from a light not from the sun or stars.

If we begin today to give a cup of water to one of our neighbors in His Name, we shall begin to learn how dark and cold life is without Him.

And then in our own lives we will know the freshness of that morning of creation when the Word sounded forth -- "Let there be light."

The great light is already here. The festival of light has been appointed by God for you and for me. Can we throw open the shutters of our dark room and let the light in?

Otherwise, how will we know what joy is?

Every day we take that leap that send us into the light rather than back to our shuttered rooms;

Every day is like the first day. There is a drab and formless void all around us -- and then the word of God thrusts through the darkness and says "Let there be light."

And what was dark and void is illumined and the contours and fragility of a human being are brought out -- and then in our ears is a fortissimo of sound and a wondrous "Ohhhh" escapes our lips as we gaze at a person whom we see fresh and alive and wondrous as a first creation.

A creation seen as loved and lovely in the light of Jesus Christ.

Amen.