

Third Sunday After Epiphany – 2020

Isaiah 9:1-4

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Matthew 4:12-25

J.R.R. Tolkien wrote the Lord of the Rings saga. In this epic tale, Galadriel is an exceptionally captivating character. A queen of the Elves, she is regal, wise, powerful and full of grace. She knows the perilous road on which Frodo, the humble Hobbit, is embarking. Galadriel extends to Frodo a precious gift. “And you, Ring-bearer,” she said, turning to Frodo. “For you I have prepared this.” She held up a small crystal vial: it glittered as she moved it, and rays of white light sprang from her hand. “In this vial,” she said, “is caught the light of Eärendil, our most beloved star. It will shine still brighter when night is about you. May it be a light to you in dark places, when all other lights go out.” On the journey, the perilous journey, Frodo relied on that light, that beloved light.

Are you familiar with darkness, with the pitch of night that creeps into the soul? This world can be a very dark place. Apart from God and His Word, apart from God and His grace, Apart from God and His Christ there is nothing but darkness. The world fancies darkness. Oblivious to its true nature, the world is addicted to darkness. You are different. Each of you has the gift of discernment. Some use it to more advantage while some let the gift grow rusty, dusty. You know the value of light. You know that you are on a journey. The path you walk has been blazed by your mothers and fathers in the faith. It can be a perilous road. So much in this life is beyond your ability to control. Evil, like a pack of wolves, hyenas, haunts your steps, waiting for opportunity.

I suspect that you have known dark times. Previously, World War has cloaked our culture in radical unease. A Great Depression, Nuclear threat, Islamist terror – the eclipse of evil has attempted to block out the sun. Personally, darkness comes to everyone. Health concerns, loneliness, lack of work, lack of money, lack of friendship – couple these things with addiction – self or mate, death of child or spouse, intimate relationships crumbling and darkness is more than a mere concept, it is a force. Sin – repeated sin, inexcusable sin – the kind that looks you in the eye as it plunges in the dagger of guilt – sin is the power of darkness, the sin that we commit, the sin that is committed against us and leaves us in a heap of shame. This world is broken. The prince of darkness has no mercy. The devil respects no one. He is the god of this age, the one who is behind the death of millions of pre-born children, the one who has built a kingdom on lies.

Deep darkness; that is man’s heart, man’s idolatrous heart, beating with lust and greed and selfishness, profoundly empty. You know the truth of this for you know yourself. Time and again, you have renounced these things. You don’t want to live in them. You have, by God’s Spirit, turned in repentance from those things which are dark and empty and vain. You are discerning. You have the Spirit of God. You have known the goodness of light. You know that God has provided righteousness for you – that Christ is the Light of the World.

A great light – that is the Incarnate Son of God. He has come to us. Into this world of pitch, the Light of heaven has descended and made our streets his home. On us, light has shined. Called

you out of darkness and brought you into His marvelous light. What is there, what treasure is in the light? Truth – God’s Word brings you truth. Love, Hope, Joy, Freedom, Purpose, Life, Forgiveness – your eyes are bright with these heavenly realities, all because Christ has dwelt among us, dwells among us. “Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling” (Psalm 43:3). “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you” (Isaiah 60:1). “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear” (Psalm 27:1). Those biblical words are rich in meaning, and you know how valid they are, how accurate and telling they are. That is where you want to be, in the Light, for God has awakened that desire in you, by His Spirit, by this Word.

It was so dark. Christ was hanging on a cross, bleeding, bearing sin, suffering the mocking, the shame – naked and cursed – and it was so dark, so wretchedly dark. An oppressive force, darkness veiled Christ the King. “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matthew 27:40). That He assuredly would not do. For you, for you to have life in the light, for you to be delivered from sin and death – that He assuredly would not do. His Father’s wrath against sin, Jesus suffers – it was so dark. For murder and abuse, for adultery and deceit and thievery and cruelty of every sort – Jesus hangs on a cross and receives the due penalty for our sin. The penitent thief speaks the divine message: “He has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:41). He died for you. He died in darkness that you might live eternally in light. That is true. That is most certainly true.

These words are from Colossians: “The Father has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14). You were baptized in light. Christ’s blood was in the water of your baptism. Light of Light washed over you, Christ’s righteousness washed over you, and you were transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son. You are a son of Light. You are a daughter of the Day. The resurrection shines in you for you are baptized, an heir of heaven where there is no night, no darkness at all.

Light of Light was walking by the Sea of Galilee and He was intent on building His church. Follow me. Simon and Andrew, James and John – follow Me! How far removed from those words do you believe yourself to be? Jesus said this: “I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). You are most assuredly in those words. His will is to save you, to have you follow Him, to bless you with the Light of His Word that you may see your Christian path in this world. Follow me! This church was built because Christ has spoken those words to us all. God’s Word is living and active, Christ Himself promised that wherever two or three are gathered in His name, there He is in the midst of them. “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27). So said the Lord of the church, the Lord who serves you with His death and resurrection. The Light of Christ shines in this place for the Lord is here to serve sinners with forgiveness and hope and love.

He went all throughout Galilee preaching. His Word was unleashed and people just like you had an epiphany. This is the Christ. He is God’s Messiah. “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined” (Isaiah 9:2). That... is... us! We have an epiphany. When Christ’s word is preached, where His

sacraments are administered, there He is, to bring His healing. Our eyes are open to His work in this place. And we serve Him. For the world's sake, you are light. Love others as Christ has loved you. Defend the helpless. Teach the faith to children. Bring consolation to the downhearted, bring Christ to them, speak of what He has done. Be Galadriel to others. Give them our beloved Light when they are in a dark place. As you do, you are regal, you are full of grace, and you are beautiful to your brother, your sister. Fishers of men; the net of the Gospel has brought you to this light house. "The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Taught by our Lord we are bold to confess: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105).