

**December 27 ONE SERVICE ONLY @ 10:45**

**Sermon Series: Holy Darkness**

**10:45am: Ps 148; Luke 2: 22-40**

**Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel**

**We are concluding our Holy Darkness series; a series to change the narrative of how you and I may perceive darkness in the world.**

- For as I have reiterated over these past few weeks of this sermon series; darkness typically gets a bad wrap in this country.
- From horror movies to different hues of skin tones, unfortunately darkness is something that a lot of us have been conditioned to fear or sometimes avoid.
- But I thought about it; darkness was created with some of the same intentionality as day and light was.
- There is tremendous purpose for darkness.
- For instance, in the dark personally, is where I have received some of my greatest wisdom and inspiration.
- In many ways, the older I have become, I have begun to appreciate the dark;
- I have begun to embrace the dark night sky and all of its wonders with a sense of appreciation and assurance that the world finally gets to slow down a bit and breathe if that makes sense.
- And so with that said, I have modeled week to week in this sermon series, that the goal of this sermon is to locate the darkness within our scriptures this morning; understanding that just as darkness is not always

ominous and frightening; darkness is not always something that can be detected or defined literally.

- The darkness that the Spirit of God has been leading me to name in these passages over these past few weeks are more abstract but no less still as holy as Jesus on Transfiguration Day.
- And so looking at our gospel today, I am identifying three instances of darkness that may or may not be evident.
- The first area of darkness that is rather abstract, but we all may be able to relate to is Simeon's impending death located in verse 26.
- Now directly before this verse in vs 25, the Word states that Simeon was religious and devout.
- And so some might challenge me and suggest that since Simeon had faith that his impending death is not an example of darkness;
- On the contrary, Simeon should be assured to see the light when he transitions on for he will be with Jesus right?
- And my response is that yes Simeon will be met with Jesus, this I wholeheartedly believe.
- However, on a very practical level, this does not change the fact that even for those who have faith, death can be a frightening and dark mystery.
- If I am honest, in the midst of this pandemic especially, I have been thinking about death a lot.
- Although I am a strong believer, this does not change the fact that I am not ready to move on to be with

Jesus anytime soon, nor am I wanting to see my family, friends and loved ones do so.

- So the reason why I am raising this important topic is to proclaim that although death is life for us; death can still reflect some measure of mysterious darkness.
- What I appreciate though about Simeon is that even in this dark mystery, Simeon's faith projects a measure a light and faith that I believe we can all learn and glean from.
- For the Word tells us that all Simeon wants to do before he dies was catch a glimpse of Jesus.
- In our story, Simeon addresses God as **Lord** (v. 29).
- This is not the common word for Lord, *kyrios*, but the rare word *despotes*, which has been taken over into English.
- This is the only place where it occurs in the Gospels. One scholar noted that it "denoted absolute ownership and uncontrolled power."
- The word for **servant** means "slave."
- It was because Simeon was the submissive slave of his Master that he was given the great privilege of holding in his arms the infant Jesus and of being the first to welcome Him as the Messiah.
- This allowed Simeon to embrace his death knowing and trusting that the dark abyss he was about to enter was really beautiful; for his eyes has seen the light of Christ for himself.
- For me this is a remarkable example of how although death is indeed a dark mystery; but death is still holy

and beautiful in many ways and something that we need not fear but embrace when the time comes.

- **The second instance of darkness that is implied in my theological imagination is in vs 33-34 of our gospel today where it says *And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 34 Then Simeon[f] blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed 35 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."***
- So even though Jesus have been the long prophesied Son of God that would come and set the captives free, the prophet also mentioned that Jesus path to doing this would be met with darkness.
- For although I love the lyrics of Silent Night;  
*Silent night, holy night!*  
*All is calm, all is bright.*  
*Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child.*  
*Holy infant so tender and mild,*  
*Sleep in heavenly peace,*
- The conditions in times that Jesus was born in would indicate that it would not remain a silent night for him.
- For the moment directly after Jesus performs his first miracle; the transformation of water into wine at the wedding of Cana (John 2) and most likely before then, an anxious buzz began to stir within the communities and it would not be long before the Roman soldiers would plot for his life.

- Not to mention Mary his mother would have to come to terms of what it really meant to have a son who is the Messiah.
- Unfortunately, she would not get to watch her son grow old and this would be as agonizing for her as a sword piercing her soul.
- So you see this darkness I am highlighting reflects the darkness of humanity that will make its appearance;
- This darkness will turn the praises of Hosanna in the highest into shouts of Crucify him.
- This darkness would create wounds in many lives that to this day humanity cannot fully understand.
- But even in this, this is what makes what is known as the Magnificat so magnificent.
- Because Mary's response would not be a response that I would organically embrace as a mother myself.
- So how Mary turned darkness into something holy is through her Hymn of Praise that is not in our reading but occurs a few verses later;
- Mary proclaimed My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,

*My spirit rejoices in God my Savior*

*for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.*

*From this day all generations will call me blessed:*

*the Almighty has done great things for me,*

*and holy is his Name.*

- What a powerful witness of how we might respond in dark situations Hallelujah!
- **The third instance of darkness that is more literal comes from Anna the prophet found in verse 36.**

- The Word tells us the Anna was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 then as a widow to the age of eighty-four.
- Where we see the impact of darkness is where the Word tells us that Anna never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day.
- And so the reason why I am inspired and encouraged by Anna is that she is a prime example of taking advantage of the stillness and quietness that night brings.
- In my Spiritual training there was a song that we would sing in the African American Church by Fred Hammond entitled *We're Blessed*.
- Some of the lyrics of this song says

*We're blessed in the city*

*We're blessed in the field*

*We're blessed when we come and when we go*

**And the blessings come according to the song**

*Late in the midnight hour, God's gonna turn it around*

*It's gonna work in your favor*

- And you all should see the church members go crazy at this last stanza with joy and declaration; turning around as they sing that God is at work;
- And this is what I am envisioning may have occurred similarly with our prophet Anna;
- For the reason why I too tend to pray at night and cry at night and even worship at night is because I believe **there is something special about that midnight hour;**

- I don't know if its because most of us are sleeping or what; but this is when I tend to be able to hear that silent whisper of God's voice a little clearer like Elijah;
- **At the midnight hour**, this is when I am able to sense my metaphorical mountains being moved from here to there.
- **Late in the midnight hour**, is when my grief, anguish or despair tends to shift;
- **Perhaps this is the essence** of the Psalmist of Psalm 30:5; *Weeping may endure for a night but joy comes in the morning!*
- **Perhaps this is the release** that Jacob needed after wrestling with the angel on the hill of Penuel (Genesis 32: 22-32)
- **Perhaps this is the awakening** that Nicodemus experienced when he sought after Jesus (John 7:37-39)
- **Because late in the midnight hour**, God seems to be especially active or at least it is more apparent because the Earth has quieted down;
- Making it evident;
- Making it obvious;
- That darkness is indeed Beautiful!
- Let the Church Say Amen!
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