***Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church***

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 ***The Teller August, 2020***

# GOD’S BEAUTIFUL DARK WORKS

Perhaps one of the best-known verses in the New Testament is John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” It comes toward the end of a deep conversation between [Nicodemus](https://www.livinglutheran.org/2020/03/lectionary-blog-god-grants-grace/), a leader of his people, and Jesus. Much has been made about the detail that Nicodemus sought out Jesus at night. Was he afraid to be seen? Was this a stealthy move under the cover of darkness?

This encounter isn’t usually regarded as Nicodemus’ finest hour. The mention of night casts a shadow (pun intended) on this holy meeting. Darkness and blackness and night are too often contrasted with lightness and whiteness and day, and found deficient. But I want to consider the beautiful dark works of God.

“In the beginning … darkness covered the face of the deep” (Genesis 1:1-2). Creation began in the dark. The mysterious outpouring of God’s love that brought all things into being, and continues creating and sustaining the universe and all that is in it, was the beautiful dark work of God.

When Abram began to doubt God’s faithfulness, the Lord took him on a walk and, pointing to the midnight sky, said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them. … So shall your descendants be” (Genesis 15:5). Jacob wrestled all night with God and was irrevocably changed. Samuel heard a voice calling to him in the dark and became a mighty prophet. At midnight, the Lord passed over Egypt and set the people free.

The Messiah’s birth was announced by angels to shepherds in the dark. Jesus’ Passion began and his Holy Supper was given “on the night in which he was betrayed.” When he was crucified, it was dark from noon to 3. The redemption of all creation was a beautiful dark work of God.

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Presiding Bishop Emeritus [H. George Anderson](https://www.elca.org/About/History/Former-Presiding-Bishops/The-Rev-H-George-Anderson) was asked to comment on the Crystal Cathedral (now Christ Cathedral)—the glass structure filled with light. He observed that light didn’t allow spaces for dark where one could sense the mystery of God. King Solomon understood that when, at the dedication of the temple, he declared, “The Lord has said that he would dwell in thick darkness” (1 Kings 8:12). The glory of God is shielded and revealed in darkness. It is incomprehensible and irresistible.

Back to Nicodemus. Maybe he was experiencing his own “dark night of the soul” when he came looking for Jesus. This expression has come to stand for doubt and angst and emptiness. That’s not how St. John of the Cross meant it. He understood it to be the beginning of his journey toward union with God, toward communion with Love. I think Nicodemus was looking for the same thing, and he found it. It was in this middle-of-the-night, heart-of-darkness promise that Jesus revealed to Nicodemus the intention God had for the world God so loved.

Darkness isn’t a symbol of emptiness, or godforsakenness. It’s not synonymous with everything that is dry and barren and lifeless. Nine chapters later in the Gospel of John, Jesus tells his disciples: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (12:24). I think of the rich, black soil of my native Ohio. Each spring it brings abundant life. Single grains become many; individuals become community. As Sister Joan Chittister wrote: “Darkness deserves gratitude. It is the alleluia point at which we learn to understand that all growth does not take place in the sunlight.”

By tradition, the Resurrection is heralded at night during the [Easter Vigil](https://www.livinglutheran.org/2020/04/keeping-vigil/). In this beautiful liturgy people gather in the darkness and hear the ancient words: “This is the night when once you led our forebears, Israel’s children, from slavery in Egypt. This is the night when Christ broke the prison bars of death.”

The liberation of God’s people, Israel, and the redemption of all creation are the beautiful dark works of God.

**Do you have a favorite quote you’d like to share? Maybe some words of wisdom or a story? An insight or epiphany you’ve had? An experience involving God?**

**We would love to hear from you! Send us your thoughts or come see Pr. Amy and we will get them down for you! This is a way of sharing the vast knowledge and resource within our congregation and share our faith and lives together!**

**Ponder Anew**…*what the Almighty can do!*

**Belong. Believe. Be Sent.**

**Share Jesus Christ for Life!**

Our mission statement. One developed many years ago but that has stood the test of time. Short. Concise. Easy to say. And now, thanks to Alan, can be sung as well. What does it really mean? For us as a congregation and for us who call Zion home? I’m continuing to explore what this means for us at Zion. **I am still asking you to share with me if and how you connect with the statement and any thoughts, ponders, feelings you have.**

 As I have been continuing to reflect on the statements as a whole and the words individually, it is still relevant to ask “How has this changed due to the pandemic?” Zion is not the same as we were and we can’t totally go back to our “normal”. We are beginning to see and live out changes and adjustments. So as we look at our mission statement, the Bishops words “***Listen Deeply Think Creatively Act Boldly***” remain in my mind. How might we do that in this context? **I invite you to *“Ponder Anew”* with me.**

The third theme in our mission statement is **Be Sent.** What does it mean for us, as Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church and disciples of Christ? Being sent begins by **leaving where we are to go out somewhere else.** In the name of our church, we call ourselves Zion **Evangelical** Lutheran Church. That is our being sent out into the world. So not only are we Lutherans and Christians and disciples of Christ, we are evangelists- not a term usually associated with Lutherans…When Rev. Billy Graham was asked what an evangelist is, he compared it to being a newscaster or journalist whose mission is to tell the Good News of Christ. “ The primary responsibility”, he said, “ is to preach God’s Word, telling people simply and clearly what God says concerning his son, Jesus Christ and what he has done for all,” While simple in principal, we often find it very difficult in practice. We “love to tell the story” but we’re afraid to do so. We fear we won’t use the right words, we’ll say the wrong thing, we’ll offend someone, etc. As Lutherans, our task is to be a witness, not convert someone. Conversion is up to the Holy Spirit. A witness simply tells what they know. We tell what we know from what the bible tells us- of God, out of great love, seeking after the people of God, of wanting a relationship, of sending Jesus to do that by teaching, healing, forgiving, dying and rising. I always taught the Confirmation students that a good place to start as a witness is with the Apostles Creed. It is a concise statement of what we believe, based in God’s Word- God the Father (love), God the Son (grace) and

God the Holy Spirit (community). Speaking these ideas begins our witness, but it doesn’t end there. We all know talk can be cheap. If we don’t live what we speak, it means little. Ghandi once said,” I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” While harsh words, we know this can be true- and not just about others but about ourselves, too. **To be sent** is not only to ‘tell the story’ but to live it as well. I was listening to a podcast the other day with a conversation between Fr. Richard Rohr and Episcopal Bishop Michael Curry ( you may know him from marrying Megan Markle and Prince Harry). Both are favorite pastors and theologians of mine with much wisdom to share. They were talking about spiritual lives, Reclaiming Jesus, the Church and the people of God. Bishop Curry said, “You can’t think your way into a new way of living. You have to live your way into a new way of thinking.” We try to live out our faith- but it isn’t just about reading, learning and speaking but living and practicing as well. And as we do, what a story we have to share! Not just our “successes” but our weaknesses, our mistakes and how that has helped us grow. Many of us are older and have many experiences to share- how God has helped us through difficult times, how our faith has made a difference in our lives, how maybe we strayed or doubted but God brought us back. Yes, we have a lot to share- but we also have much to listen to from others- especially those who are younger or different from us. In these stories and experiences, we hear of Love, Grace and Community and experience Father, Son and Spirit.

 I doubt I am telling you anything earth-shatteringly new- *so why is it we have such difficulty with evangelism, with being sent?* Perhaps because, if we are honest, we have a hard time believing it to be true on a deep, intimate level. We know it in our heads, we can say it with our mouths but to trust God ***so much*** that we can apply it to ourselves, unworthy beings that we are, sometimes seems next to impossible. I don’t say this lightly or flippantly. This is based on over 40 years of experience as a therapist and a pastor, listening to people’s deepest fears and problems. It is often so hard for us to believe that our Triune God could truly love and accept us- knowing what we know about ourselves, our experiences, our lives. And if we have a difficult time believing it for ourselves, what kind of witness can we truly be? Yet when we are able to grasp it- if only a little- what a freedom we can have- and a story we just have to tell. And it doesn’t mean that doubts won’t creep back to taunt us. My experience is that it is like the sun that breaks through on a cloudy day. It’s a little brighter, a little warmer and can lift one’s spirit a little higher. Eventually, the clouds close back up. But in my mind’s eye I hold the memory of the brightness and warmth of that shining sun. And my spirit can be lifted. Bishop Curry is right- we can’t think our way into a new way of living; we have to live our way into a new way of thinking- and then that’s what we share with the world. Being sent into the world. As an evangelist. To share and live the Good News!! Thanks be to God!

Blessings to each of you **as together we share Jesus Christ for Life,** albeit in a different way! Pr. Amy

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**Current:**

Dorothy Parsons, Robert & Lois Dowd, Jon Perkins, Linda Rager Hampton, Clayton Marcum and family, George Killian and family, Becky Oden, Nancy Jamerson, Dean McKinley, Dan Speicher, Marlene Eades, Ruth Ann Schlitt, Pr. Paul Rowe

**Ongoing:**

Peggy Gilbert, Mara Joy Nelson, Owen Vannoster and his family

**Homebound:**

Marie Betten-Niccum, Bo & Joanne Boettcher, Nancy Coble, Betty Hamlin, Ruth Hauser, Betty Lawrenz, Vada Lee Nixon



**To Tony Miller, Cheryl Working and Chloe Steele who have made sure we have had weekly worship services and resources posted each week on our website and Facebook page.**

**To Dave and Amy Neild, Jack Vineyard and Pr. Amy for preparing and serving the Community meal July 28.**

**August Birthdays **

 3 Joanne Boettcher

 19 Jane Grandstaff

 24 Lorraine Slifer

 28 Megan Trisler

**August Baptisms **

25 Daniel Krouse

 Erin Working

31 Brian Spratt

**August Anniversaries** 

17 Jon & Mary Beth Perkins

**From the Daniel’s Place newsletter…**

**Full of Energy!**

  So many amazing things happened this last month! We are thrilled to have stayed busy by having guests all day and almost every day during the month of July. This totaled a whopping 316 hours of care, fun and learning! Along with care hours soaring, the Main View has decided to donate part of their sales every Monday through Wednesday in support of Daniel's Place and started a Round Up your bill initiative that donates that difference to Daniel's Place! (See more below)  We are excited to share that we are starting the very early stages of designing our very own home! This will allow us to care for more guests at a time and provide overnight stays for up to two weeks! Just a few of the perks that will come with our own building. We are so energized and excited to be delving into this chapter of our journey!

**Main View Donates!**

Every Monday through Wednesday from 11-4 the Main View is donating 2% of sales to Daniel's Place!  On top of this they implemented a Round Up your bill button for Daniel's Place all day everyday!

  We are so incredibly grateful for their constant support. We are so glad that other businesses believe in us as much as we do!

Go support the Main View while also supporting Daniel's Place!

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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