

Communion Meditation “Light in the Wilderness”

Scripture Readings– Psalm 19, John 3:14-21

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Blythe Denham Kieffer, D.Min.

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Springfield, IL

The first scripture reading is Psalm 19. C.S. Lewis considered Psalm 19 “the greatest poem in the psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.” The God whose sovereignty is proclaimed by cosmic voices is the God who addressed a personal word to humankind in the gift of God’s word and commandments....providing personal insight and a guiding light along the way. This is the Word of God.

*1 The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God’s handiwork. 2 Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; 4 yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens God has set a tent for the sun, 5 which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. 6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat. 7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; 8 the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes; 9 the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. 11 Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. 12 But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. 13 Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. 14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.*

Our second scripture reading is John 3:16-21. Nicodemus, a Pharisee, comes to see Jesus at night in the darkness. Following a conversation about being born anew, Jesus speaks of God’s love for the world in the light of Christ and the sad reality that some choose the darkness instead. Hear now the Word of God.

*16 ‘For God so loved the world that God gave God’s only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17 ‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Those who believe in Christ are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God. Amen.*

Title of the meditation: "Light in the Wilderness"

*The text: The commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes. Psalm 19:8b*

Let us pray. Loving and Holy God, thank you for the light you shine into our lives, giving us insight, perspective and an extra measure of your grace. As we reflect on scripture, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

Dr. Tanya DeSanto and her daughter, Emma Batterman, returned Friday from their third medical mission to Haiti with IAMM (International Assist Medical Missions) in Springfield. Dr. DeSanto treated dental patients while Emma learned from her mother the importance of venturing beyond one's comfort zone to serve others in need. These mission experiences are life-changing. My husband Peter, a pediatrician, and I partook in two similar medical missions with our son Paul while he was in high school. I would like to share one of our experiences on a trip to the Dominican Republic.

We had completed the tenth and final day of seeing patients. We were exhausted. Our final evening at the school in Santa Grande de Boya (where we slept under mosquito nets in the hot, open air) was spent in a time of sharing and singing. Then the group walked into the small town square for our nightly ice cream cone. Because the three of us were especially tired, we decided to walk back together a little early.

We had been told to walk in groups and I don't know if it was because it was our last night and we were beginning to feel especially comfortable or because we were tired and not thinking, or because we thought three was a group, but our decision was not in keeping with the guidelines we were given when the mission began.

As we turned down the final street to our destination, I remember thinking to myself that the darkness was so thick, one could almost penetrate it. The only light we had in the pitch blackness before us were the flashlights the guys were carrying. Paul and I were walking a few steps ahead of Peter and we were less than a half a block from our destination when two young men came out from behind a tree on the side of the road and grabbed Peter, one on each of his arms. They were speaking in Spanish, which I didn't understand.

Paul and I quickly turned around and the light from Paul's flashlight revealed that one of the men was pointing a gun toward Peter's abdomen. They were trying to pull him to the side of the road and looked frightened. Peter was taller and stronger than both of them and resisting, however he was being careful not to make any quick moves that might startle them. He, too, had seen the gun directed at him. Peter later commented about the irony of being in the dark and not being afraid and then seeing the glint of the light on the handgun and being terrified.

I will never forget this moment in time and the fear and regret and angst I felt deep within. Our lives flashed before my eyes and I thought to myself. It's over! It's too late! We can't go back...my husband is going to be shot in front of our son and I am powerless to do anything about it.

Assuming they wanted money, I pulled out the few bills I had in my pocket and held them up. Speaking in perfect English, I said, "Here! Take the money!" Of course, they did not understand a word I was saying. Peter, on the other hand, was calmly speaking in Spanish "No entiendo!"

“I do not understand!” which they did understand. We later talked about the speech that flowed that night that was heard and not heard!

This probably went on for not more than 30 seconds (which felt like an eternity)! All of a sudden, one of the young men grabbed Peter’s glasses off his face and the two of them ran down the dark street out of our vision and out of our lives. The three of us were in shock and ran back to the school, where we spent the next couple of hours explaining what happened, contacting the local police and finding comfort and solace from our team members. The rest of the group at the town square were alerted and escorted home together.

We experienced a truth that night that we all know intellectually, however; it was brought home in a personal and powerful way. By the grace of God goes each one of us! Doing good is no guarantee for protection from the dangers in this world! Even when we follow the rules or our breaches are minor, our lives are not immune from being ambushed or interrupted by illness, loss or betrayal. And when it happens, our spirits cry out “No entiendo!” I do not understand!

It was a long night and there was great relief when the sun rose the next morning. The light brought comfort and warmth. The rhythm of a new day reassured us that even though our lives felt out of control, there was order in the world God created.

During our medical missions to the Dominican Republic and the Amazon River Valley, we were aware of how much of life revolves around the rising and setting of the sun. It is also true for us, although we are less mindful of it. Daylight savings time began today giving us an extra hour of sunlight as we move into spring.

The ancient Hebrew who wrote Psalm 19 understood that in the same way that life rely on the rising and setting of the sun, our lives are dependent on the Word of God. As the warmth of the sun reaches out, stirring, calling forth life, the commandments of God are life giving, rejoicing the heart, and enlightening the eyes. There is still danger in the wilderness and we are not immune from ambushes along the way, but we can trust in God to light the paths we travel and to give insight and perspective to the experiences which shape our character and speak to whom we become.

The final plea in Psalm 19 is a request that not only the words but the unspoken, unexposed meditations of the heart be acceptable to God. The psalm moves from the outer reaches of the natural world to the inner recesses of the human heart and we are reminded once again of the wonder and mystery of a God who not only chooses to give us the word that is a light in the wilderness, but a God who chose to join us in the wilderness in the wildness of God’s mercy...and the Word became flesh and lived among us and we have seen God’s glory, full of grace, light and truth. Amen.