

The First Sunday after Christmas Day
Sermon for December 26, 2021
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Psalm 147

Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7

John 1:1-18

“In the beginning was the Word...”

We begin to understand what John means when he writes of the “word” when we understand that the Greek word “logos” means far more than the simplistic understanding of letters put together to form the symbolic expression of text as language.

Logos is the divine conversation,
the cognitive relationship between human and divine,
the reasoning, the comprehending,
the relational grasp of concepts that mean more than mere words can express.

The logos is the light come into the world,
and I prefer the King James’ response of the darkness
than that given in our lectionary.

In the NRSV translation:

“the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

But in the King James version:

“the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.”

We are the darkness, and we do not comprehend the light.
The light brings the love of God into this world.

You see love is what the power of God brings.

Love is not what power gives.

This coming Wednesday we will observe the feast of the Holy Innocents.

In our Christian calendar we mark the day that Herod’s army slaughtered all the male children under the age of two in the area of Bethlehem.

What kind of mind would consider such an act?

But it happened before and it has happened since.

I participated in a Bible study recently,
and we began talking about all the violence in the Old Testament,
and how Christianity had become so violent through the ages.
The questions were flying about how this could happen.
The comment about Isaiah's words
that I will not keep silent or rest until vindication and salvation
shine out like a burning torch, was "I think it's overdue."

How long, O Lord, how long?

A slaughter of innocent blood that we see repeated age after age
under the labels of genocide and ethnic cleansing.
Slaughter upon slaughter.

How long, O Lord, how long?

We desire justice. We demand justice.
We ask that the voices of the innocent be heard.
It's a voice, like the Scripture say, crying in the wilderness.

Isaiah wrote about that desire for justice and the coming of the light
as the vindication of Jerusalem and the light of salvation.
And Paul writing in Galatians foresees the light of Christ
as the personification of faith.

Paul's talking all about the light being the coming of freedom and salvation.
"Now before faith came..." he writes, we were bound by the law,
but now we are freed as heirs of the promise of the inheritance of the Father's love.

Paul writes of the promise in the section that is left out of the reading today.
In the section that's omitted we hear that for Paul:
"in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith."

The reality is that in the light and love of Christ:
"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

And just as the chosen people are children of the promise,
So – “if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring,
heirs according to the promise.

The promise is that we will not be forever surrounded by darkness.
As our lives grow fuller into the light of Christ,
we see more clearly and watch as the darkness diminishes, little by little.

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest, talks about God loving the world so much,
but that over the years we grew to fear God
for all the wrath attributed to him in the Old Testament.

God sent Christ into the world
so that we might see the loving face of God in human form.

It is our faces the world sees – even wearing a mask – you can see a smile.

An article in *Live Science*, titled “Why You Should Smile at Strangers”,
discusses studies where people were asked to smile at other people
as they walked down the street.
Such a small, simple thing to do.

Sociologists looked at a variety of contextual influences,
but the two main sources of data were:

- (1) How the people who smiled at others felt afterward, and
- (2) How the people that were smiled at felt.

The results were positive.
The smilers felt that their outlook improved markedly
and the people who were smiled at felt uplifted
and were more willing to smile at others as they went through their day.

Given the darkness we have all shared these past two years with Covid,
just think of the light a smile would bring you on any number of dark days

In the darkness we wait to see the loving face of God in the smile of another.

Love is a gift.

It is tangible.

It is real.

It is the word, the logos, that was born of Mary and has spread to all the world.

It is the gift we share with each other in the words we give to one another to reach for understanding and comprehension amidst the darkness.

It is our comprehension of each other
that brings light into the shadows of misunderstanding and mistrust.

It is our sharing of love of God and our neighbors
that diminishes the hate in the world.

The love of God for all God's people.