**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**January 2nd, 2022**

**Looking for the Light**

1. Light a Candle

As I write this sermon, I light a candle. I’m not someone who usually lights candles all that

frequently on their own. It wasn’t for the aroma of the candle or because the power went out. I just felt the need for light – a light that flickered and danced and reminded me on a dark and cloudy day that light was alive.

Maybe that sounds terribly depressing, but it isn’t intended to – it’s just that we are in a season where we need to remember the light more often. While we are still in the Christmas season, the joyful rush of present wrapping and waiting for Jesus to come has ended. Now, there is this kind of sacred darkness and light– this morning, we are in an in-between space, where Jesus lies gently in a manger and his proud parents look on and the magi haven’t arrived yet. The darkness of all the world is eclipsed by this child, lying in a manger, radiating light and life and good news for the future.

So the flickering light helps me to slow down, to try and turn my mind and heart to living with both darkness and light. When it comes to darkness, it’s almost like a ‘pick your own darkness’ buffet. For many of us, it’s the darkness of the winter season, or maybe the virus and isolation, or grieving a loss, or anything that makes us feel weary. For some of us, the darkness might seem tiny, for others it feels overwhelming, and no matter where you lie on the spectrum, your darkness is welcome here into this space.

It is welcome because God calls the whole of us here – the light and the dark - the joyful, the mourning, the righteous, the grumpy, the weary, the light-hearted – in this sacred space, you bring your darkness and light and everything in between. Thank God for a love like that – a love that is that enormous, generous, and unending.

1. Darkness and Light

As the candlelight jumps around, I’m led to wonder about our text from John this morning. It is a text that I have heard often and in some ways, it reads more like a poem or prose than anything we hear in the other Gospels. It’s more philosophical in nature, but the essence of its meaning is still found when we listen with ears and eyes wide open.

What we know for sure is that Christ was here at Creation time – he was with God, though he did not appear to humanity until an appointed time. Others came before him to point to his coming – the most obvious person would be John the Baptist, but I think we can safely say that you could bring in other prophets like Isaiah, Amos, Micah, and more who pointed to a light coming into the world. We also know that darkness is not new, especially when we think about our Old Testament texts and until this very moment, we’ve seen everything from exile upon exile, wars, and more. Yet, we also know that while Christ came into the world as light, we know that light was there from the very beginning, always making a way, always seeking overwhelm the darkness.

As we think about how these words enter our lives today, I was particularly moved by something that the Rev. Dr. Ken Kovacs from Catonsville Presbyterian offered this past week. I would like to share these words with you as we think about the transitional space between 2021 and 2022. He shared a brief poem that was spoken by George VI on Christmas Day in 1939 to a country that was facing the uncertainty of war. In our times of uncertainty in these days, the words echo true. Hear these words from the poet Minnie Louise Haskins called “The Gate of the New Year”:

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

“Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.”

And he replied:

“Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.

And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

In a world where we do not know what is to come next, these words still resonate with us, so let us reach out of hands in the midst of a world we do not yet know and trust that we will find the Hand of God, the light in the darkness, to guide us as we move forward.

1. The Light

So as we step out into this new year, and as we set our resolutions or intentions that we seek in 2022, one of the ways we can choose to live into this text is to set our eyes towards seeing the light.

There are many different ways to do this, but one that I’ve found helpful, and in truth, I’m not often consistent, but still – is setting aside a mason jar and at the end of the week, I write something I am grateful for about the week. Sometimes the gratitude felt large – a new adventure, or a major accomplishment, or a project finished. Sometimes the gratitude felt lame, like I was required to write something down, even if it was silly, like – I got the recycling out on time, or I finished my laundry and actually folded it AND put it in the drawer, or I got to sit out on the porch and drink some tea in quiet.

The beauty of a gratitude jar is that it breaks down perfectionism and it makes you engage with a side of your brain that we often have to re-learn how to use in daily life. And then at the end of the year, even if you, like me, were able to do it for three months, or you had all 12 months, either way – you open the jar and you read and remember and smile and laugh and remember that there really is light when you look for it.

Other folks practice different ways of finding light in the New Year. Bryan chooses a new cuisine to learn throughout the year, which, in truth, does benefit me greatly, but for him, learning something new and engaging in it hands on offers him joy and light. Some others might find engaging in a yoga practice or committing to weekly therapy or practicing an instrument to be a way to seek light.

My disclaimer though, every new year though is – I believe that we don’t find light and we don’t find Christ when our resolutions are shame based. If you want to go on a diet to lose weight or that you will quit doing x, y, or z. There’s no light in shame. If you want to do those things as something that isn’t a resolution, that’s ok, but I hope you do choose something that offers you and others light, joy, love, and a sense of peace, because Christ came into the world for the love of us, not to make us a size 6.

1. Lighting the Way

Even with the darkness that settles in the nighttime, I still have great hope for the light of the

world, the light of Christ, to change and transform us day by day. We are now in a season where the days will get longer, little by little, and as science advances and we continue to learn how to be together well, we are getting there. There is hope and there is light.

My prayer for this year is this: May the light guide your way, especially this year as we look towards a new future. May God help us in building up our boldness, courage, and strength, as we seek to do daring things. May the words of Christ be more embedded in our minds that they become natural – where we live out those words day by day. May the Spirit guide us, nudging us towards the light when we forget the light exists, and may the Spirit hold us when we simply need to sit in the darkness. May this year be another one of growth – of learning and deepening our faith, of strengthening our relationships, and of discovering who God is calling us to be. May we find and be the light of Christ to ourselves and others, this, and every day. Thanks be to God. Amen.