

Texts: Genesis 1:1-2:4a; John 1:1-5

Subject: Six Days of Creation and the Sabbath

Theme: Light it Up

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 12, 2021; God's Work Our Hands Sunday;

Living Hope Lutheran, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We were camping at Cathedral Gorge State park with the Girl Scouts a few years back and noticed the Las Vegas Astronomical society setting up. They had their telescopes linked to laptop computers, and were ready to take detailed photos of the night sky. When you go 2 hours north of Las Vegas, and get into the places where the only light you see comes from above, you gain a new perspective. It was a wonder to see nebulas, and galaxies, uncountable stars twinkling in the deep dark. The astronomers, professionals and hobbyists too sat around for hours answering questions of the physical nature of the universe. One thing they could not answer is "why?"

God said. The Word came, and light was. It all started there. With a *word*, God creates. The world we know from our observation was first observed by God, who after speaking light into existence, along with the waters, sky and the dry land, brought forth life, in good order. And God observed, sat back and looked - and saw that it was good. What was good about it? Was it beautiful, certainly. Was it productive? Must have been. Was it in balance? Was it bountiful? Was it righteous? It was good. God created it.

There's great mystery in the story. Was the land under the sea? What about dinosaurs? What about the other planets? We have all sorts of questions. Living in the mystery is good. What we can know from the story is that God is a giver. God is active. God approves of the world God made.

The context of the story was a bit of a contest, a revealing of Israel's God in contrast to the gods of the surrounding cultures, who worshipped the sun and moon as divine. Israel's God made them all. God set them in the heavens, divided the water, a symbol of chaos, from the sky, and the land itself brought forth new life. See how the light is created before the sun itself. The Sun is not the giver of the light in the story - therefore it cannot be worshipped. It is God's creation. God makes the world and with a Word, he lights it up. The light is good. The light begins the process, the making of the waters and sky, the land appears, and the earth creates too, it brings forth plants, trees, fruit. Then the heavenly bodies, the sun and moon and stars, for keeping time and seasons. They serve their purpose.

Psalm 104 shares a vision of the light as the clothing of God:

You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens plike a tent.

Each part of creation lives in the light of God, and the light nurtures the land and the trees, and the beasts and the human beings too. God speaks and creates on the 6th day humankind in their image, and gives trees and fruit for food. God gives the creation as a gift, and the creation, in return gives glory to God.

Theologian and storyteller Megan McKenna tells of a Jewish tradition which understand the light that God creates as the spark, the soul of every human being, shattered, separated, and scattered. To reunite the light is to repair the world, *tikkun olam*. In the first creation story in Genesis, God speaks and light comes forth, sending lights across the world, that they would be reunited, healed, and repaired.¹

¹ Felten, David M., and Jeff Proctor-Murphy. *Living the Questions: The Wisdom of Progressive Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 31.

The one who can redeem, repair, and restore the creation, is the Creator, the one who made the light itself. We might look around and wonder what's good about our world. Sometimes we need the perspective of a trip into the mountains, time at the ocean, a hike in the desert, or strapping on some snow skies - I guess some people do that. Sounds terribly cold. We struggle to see our world as good most of the time. I don't think it's because we're by nature pessimistic, though some of us may be. We suffer and experience the world as less than it was created to be. We are injured by the world, the people in it, we experience illness, and decay. We have a hard time seeing God's sustaining presence.

This weekend, I expect you talked with someone, or read a remembrance, or watched a news story about the tragedy of September 11, 2001. We all remember where we were when our hearts broke. I hope we also remember the ones who ran into the destruction, the ones who suffered after the fact, the ones who went overseas to defend us, the ones who lost parents and children and spouses and friends and whose lives would never be the same. We do remember.

The experience of a global pandemic is another one that shows us the brokenness of our world, and the scattering of the light among us. If we've been isolated, unable to travel, away from the ones we love, we may feel more separated from the light than ever. We wonder where God is and we feel the loss of the presence of the other pieces of light in our lives. You have been light to me. God has given us to one another. When we understand our neighbors as a gift from God, we may be more inclined to serve them, to care for them, to pray for them, to walk with them as part of God's good creation. We will do what is needed to protect one another and provide from

God's abundance what is needed to life. We will light up each other's lives, and share the light of God with one another, because God did not create and then disappear. God is active in the creation, sustaining it through the Word.

Jesus is this light of God we share.

He was in the beginning with God, and was with God and was God. 'God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, Begotten not made,' we say in the Nicene creed. What else can repair and redeem us? What else can bring calm from chaos and peace to our broken hearts? Jesus is the light of the world. The Word that was with God in the beginning is the Word God speaks to create life. In Jesus, through the power of the Spirit, God was coming into our creation to light it up, for the sake of bringing us back together to give glory to the Creator. Jesus the light went from the cross into the darkness of death and was raised again to new life.

The darkness did not - cannot - overcome the light.

Today, we go out into the streets around our place of worship to be light to others, to help out and work together, to share some time and effort to brighten up our neighborhood, as we paint curbs and hydrants. We care for this little section of the creation, because we live here, because it needs the help, and because it is good to do so. We'll partner with friends and neighbors, strengthen relationships, sweat, laugh, and eat together. Some of us will stay indoors and sort and pack hygiene kits, for those who will use these items. All of this is because of Jesus, who calls us into the light, who has calmed storms and claimed each one of us and calls us good not because we work hard, or act nice, or suffer well, but because of God's great love and grace, and God's

desire to unite us and renew us and heal the world. God did not stop loving this world. God has not stopped loving you.

You are made in God's image. Holy and whole. Filled with light and sent to share it with the world around you. I pray that today our efforts and actions would reflect the light of Christ in our lives. May our words speak of God's love for creation. May we give glory to the one who has made us. And then, let us rest in God's loving grace.

Amen.