



When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.

Howard Thurman wrote “The Work of Christmas” as a reminder to us that while Christmas may be a day on the calendar –

December 25th –

the true meaning of “Christ’s Mass” is to be found in how we live our lives,
each and every day.

The true meaning of Christ’s love for us and his call to us to love one another is a 365 day commitment.

There is work for us to do –

Find the lost

Heal the broken

Feed the hungry

Release the prisoner

Rebuild the nations.

Not each of us has gifts and talents for every one of these ministries- but we likely have gifts and talents for at least one of them. Thurman challenges us to find our life’s passion and to live it. Failing to do so leads to the waste of a God-given life. Nothing is quite as sad as someone who refuses to reach out to love and serve others using the gifts that he or she has been given. I’ve been struck in various conversations over the years that when asking what people feel God is calling them to, the answer is so often a blank look and “I don’t know- nothing.” God calls each of us to help bring God’s kingdom closer to the here and now. God calls each of us to be a child

of God whatever it is that we may do for a living. God calls each of us- not one of us is exempt from God's outstretched hand and plea that we hear and we respond to God's love.

The psalmist tells us that the Lord is my light and my salvation. The Lord is the strength of our life. With the Lord as the strength of our life, we do not need to be afraid of others (Ps. 27:1). This does not mean that we may not face physical danger or that we shouldn't take reasonable precautions when situations are dangerous. Rather, the prophet reminds us that our true home is with God regardless of what happens to us on earth. Our final goal is to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life (Ps. 27:5).

What are our gifts and talents?

Where are we agents for positive change?

Who are we and whose are we?

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined.

All of us have – or will – the experience of walking in darkness.

It might be a job offer that doesn't come through.

It might be the breakup of a relationship that we valued highly.

It might be something that means where we thought we were going with our life isn't going to turn out quite the way we pictured it.

The good news from the prophet Isaiah is that there is a great light. The light will shine on those who lived in a land of deep darkness. In Roman Catholic and Episcopal Churches and in Jewish synagogues, we have an "eternal light" that burns 24/7. It symbolizes the commandment to the people of Israel to keep a light burning at all times. In Jewish tradition, the light is adjacent to the ark. In most Episcopal Churches the light is adjacent to the Tabernacle or the Aumbry- the place where we keep the reserved sacrament, that is, the bread and wine that have been consecrated but not consumed. It is from this reserved sacrament that we take bread and wine to our shut-ins through the ministry of the Lay Eucharistic Visitors. It is one way we reach beyond our doors to those who cannot be with us at our Sunday services.

Time and again when angels or messengers of God appear to humans, the first thing they say is "Do not be afraid."

The message applies to us equally –

When we are walking in darkness, know that the light of God awaits us.

Not a dim light, but the light that shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it (John 1:5).

We recently celebrated Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. This holiday reminds us of the work done by Dr. King and others to Dr. King bring about a more just – an enlightened- society.

Among Dr. King's most famous speeches are the word delivered from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial: I have a dream.

Dr. King's dream was the dream Jesus spoke about. A dream of a world where all who are hungry are fed, all who are sick are cared for, all who are naked are clothed, and where all know that their call from God is to be a child of God, loved and loving towards all of God's creation. There are challenges —

mountains behind mountains, as Nelson Mandela said —
but they are only there to test the integrity, intensity and commitment of your dream.
Some will ask: when will you be satisfied.

Howard Thurman says not until

The lost are found,
The broken are healed,
The hungry are fed,
The prisoners are released,
The nations are rebuilt,
And there is peace among brothers.

When we know and accept that we are children of God, then we can do the work of the Lord in this world, we can end our day with music in the heart. As the psalmist says, I will sing and make music to the Lord (Ps. 27:9).

We can readily answer the call of our Savior Jesus Christ to proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation.

We are called, like Simon Peter and Andrew to follow Christ and to become fishers of men.

We are called to follow immediately, trusting in the Lord who is our helper, who does not forsake us. We follow the one who heals of every disease and every sickness as we read in the Gospel lesson today.

We are a people who have been in darkness but now have seen the light – the light has dawned.

The message of the cross is not foolishness to us because we are being saved by the power of God.

Go forth –
Go forth in peace.
Go forth to love and serve the Lord.

Amen

Sermon: Third Sunday After Epiphany
Is. 9:1-4; Ps. 27:1, 5-13; 1 Cor. 1:10-18; Mt. 4:12-23

January 22, 2017