

Easter 6C 2019, Revelation 21:10, 22-27: 22:1-5, May 26, 2019, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Lancaster, PA, Kurt S. Strause

There are few places where I get bewildered, but one of them is when I go the store and try to buy a simple light bulb. It used to be such a simple task. Do I need a sixty watt bulb, 75 or a hundred watt? Now it seems like they're coming out with different kinds of light bulbs each month. I thought I was the only one, but it must be true. The other day I was at the big home improvement store and I just watched other people walk up to the display shelves of light bulbs and they all looked like deer caught in the headlights. They stood there staring, paralyzed, not knowing which direction to go. Most of the stores have now hired people who just take care of the light bulb customers.

Today, we walk into a room, flip a switch and the light comes on. It's something so automatic, so expected, that's it's mundane. We forget about the whole infrastructure of power generating plants, transmission lines, power substations, even our own home wiring, that brings the electricity that gives us light. To our ancestors of a hundred years ago it must have seemed like a miracle. This church building in which we worship was one of the first public buildings in Lancaster that used electricity for lighting when it was built a hundred years ago. Even then, there was a lively debate about putting in gas for lighting because some weren't sure if electricity was going to be a passing fad.

Light is God's first act of creation. Even before there is a sun, which we all know is the source of all natural light in the world, there is light. I don't look to the Bible as a science text book and here it just doesn't make scientific sense to say there can be light before there can be the sun. But I believe the Bible is telling us that light is so fundamental, so connected to God, that we can speak of light as coming from God himself. Even before there is a sun to send out the electromagnetic radiation within the proper wavelengths and frequencies there is light, as a gift whose source is God. Keep this in mind for a few moments: light whose source is not the sun, but God.

We turn now to our second reading we heard this morning, the magnificent passage from the book of Revelation. Just like Genesis tells us all about the beginning of all things, the book of Revelation tells us about the ending of all things. In the end everything old will pass away; the old cities, the old kingdoms, the old powers of this world that oppress and persecute the faithful; all of these will come to an end. God will work a new creation, unlike the old where sin and corruption and greed prevail. In the new creation the Lamb of God will sit on the throne and rule all things in a glorious and gentle kingdom in which all people will bow down and sing. At the center of this glorious kingdom will be the new city of Jerusalem, come down from heaven, unlike the old city. The new Jerusalem will

not have a Temple made of stones and wood. It has no need of one, because Jesus himself is the Temple to which all people will come to worship. And here's the pertinent verse to what I was saying earlier: "And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb." Just as at the beginning of creation there is light whose source is God and not the sun, so too in the new creation all light will come from God. No sun. No moon. Just the radiant light shining forth from the Lamb of God who is the lamp standing at its center.

While Revelation describes what will happen at the end, an ending we can trust will come to pass, we aren't there yet. We still live in between time, this time between the beginning and the end. We know and trust that Jesus the Lamb will be the source of all light in the new creation, but what about now? Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12) And in that soaring passage from the beginning of John's gospel, "What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." Jesus is the source of true light in the world, the light by which we can see the glory of God and overcome the darkness which surrounds us.

As baptized children of God we are given a portion of that light. When we are joined to the life of Christ our lives take on the radiant glow of the source of the world's true light. It's very much like taking an unlit candle, touching it to a flame and causing it to burn. The source is Christ and he desires that his light shine in and through our lives illuminating a world so desperately in need to his light. "Do not put your light under a basket," Jesus says, "but put it up high where others may see it." When new Christians are baptized we symbolize this light sharing by lighting a candle and quoting Jesus in Matthew 5:16, "let your lights shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." By our lives, by the way we live, how we regard others, the love we give, the willingness to give ourselves for the sake of the world in the name of Jesus, will be light.

We know the world can seem a dark and foreboding place at times. Cruelty, injustice, neglect of God's children seems to abound. Those who have received the light are called to scatter the darkness using the only real light they have; the light of the one who has defeated sin and death. The darkness tried to overcome the true light and it failed. Just as those who shine with the light of Christ will also prevail over the forces of death. The world will always need the light of Christ to shine within it. And that will always be our calling, to shine the light of Christ before others.