

Sermon March 11 2018

Psalm 107:1-3. 17-22

“Give thanks to the Lord because he is good,
because his faithful love lasts forever!”

2 That’s what those who are redeemed by the Lord say,
the ones God redeemed from the power of their enemies,

3 the ones God gathered from various countries,
from east and west, north and south.

17 Some of the redeemed were fools because of their sinful ways.
They suffered because of their wickedness.

18 They had absolutely no appetite for food;
they had arrived at death’s gates.

19 So they cried out to the Lord in their distress,
and God saved them from their desperate circumstances.

20 God gave the order and healed them;
he rescued them from their pit.

21 Let them thank the Lord for his faithful love
and his wondrous works for all people.

22 Let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices
and declare what God has done in songs of joy!

John 3:14-21

14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so must the Human One[d] be lifted up
15 so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. 16 God so loved the world that he
gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won’t perish but will have eternal life.

17 God didn’t send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved
through him. 18 Whoever believes in him isn’t judged; whoever doesn’t believe in him is already
judged, because they don’t believe in the name of God’s only Son.

19 “This is the basis for judgment: The light came into the world, and people loved darkness
more than the light, for their actions are evil. 20 All who do wicked things hate the light and don’t
come to the light for fear that their actions will be exposed to the light. 21 Whoever does the
truth comes to the light so that it can be seen that their actions were done in God.”

Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise. Lord, open our hearts and our lives sing out your name. Amen.

Undergraduate Philosophy Major - Plato's Allegory of the Cave

If people, forced to live in a cave, see a world created by the shadows cast by the torches that bring imperfect light into their realm. They never see the torches, or the people and objects that interrupt the particles and waves to create the shadows. They only see the shadows themselves. But what if the prisoners were freed from the cave and discovered the true world, the entire reality of life outside their imprisonment? Some might fall in love with the world of light, of matter illuminated by the sun's brilliance. Others, overwhelmed by the light and the resulting possibilities, return to the cave, choosing to live in a world of shadows.

That certainly sounds quite similar to Jesus's statement, "The light came into the world, and people loved darkness more than the light." It adds something of a rhythm and harmony to the melody of Jesus's words. All too often, the light of the world frees us from our enslavement to the shadows, but we prefer the shadows, even though they're not real, even though they're false, incomplete representations of reality, because they're familiar and easy on our eyes.

Light in polar habitats, where creatures slowly adjust to the growth of the light. It's a constant revelation of increasing brightness, so it's not hard to adjust.

Sudden exposure is different. It's good. Light what we're made for. But when we've become accustomed to the shadows, when we've preferred the dimness over the light, the immediate turn from gloom to luminescence is painful. It's like leaving the optometrist's office, when she's just dilated your pupils in the darkness to test your vision, but then you enter the real world: **BAM**. The fullness of the light is too much because you've been prepared for sight in a different realm. It might be easier to stay inside, but we weren't meant for light inside a tenebrous clinic. We were meant for the light.

It's tempting to ask this question: Who do you know that loves the shadows more than the light? We can likely all imagine someone in our lives, whether in our families or in our government or in our schools or in our workplaces that seem so wrapped up in evil that they have no interest in the good. They're so accustomed to the shadows that they don't care to find the light. We can point to their faults, identify their failures, lift up their struggle, and in so doing, we prefer the shadows over the light, the gloom over the brightness.

You see, that's what it is to love darkness more than light. To accuse others and not yourself. To critique those unlike you and to always overlook the faults of those in your inner circles. That's what St. Augustin first called *incurvatus in se*, humanity curved in upon itself. It's what my grandmother called naval gazing. To love shadows more than light is absurd because, well, shadows are impossible without light. Darkness is only the absence of light. Light is the real thing. Shadows are less of that thing. Darkness is the full absence.

Humanity is sick with a self-imposed case of seasonal affective disorder because we prefer our wispy shadows to God's piercing light. We choose to spend so much time in the shadows of despair that our moods change, our entire disposition to the world shifts, because we forget about the reality of light.

This has been very theoretical thus far, so let's get down to brass tax. What does it look like to love the shadows more than the light?

Any claims of racial or gender superiority. Because God loved the world so much, so much, that God offered their only child so that all who believe in God wouldn't perish. All who believe, not all white people. Not all men. Not just straight people or rich people or able bodied people but all people.

What does it look like to love shadows more than light? To focus on condemnation rather than salvation, because God didn't come into the world to judge it, but to bring salvation. Any theology built on condemning others, forcing decisions based on fear, is based in the darkness rather than the light.

Our baptismal promises these things: proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed; serve all people following the example of Jesus; and strive for justice and peace in all the earth. It's a kind of crescendo at the end of our commitments. To paraphrase the Gospel according to John, when "people love darkness more than the light" (3:19), we don't respond with condemnation but instead by shining Christ's light to expose the weakness of the shadows. In my various experience in Lutheran campus ministry, I've seen students take the lead on including people who identify as LGBTQ+ fully in the life of the church. I've seen campus communities open their empty housing to refugee families in need. I've seen white, straight, cisgendered, male students use their privilege to center the voices of people of color, women, immigrants, people of various abilities, and others typically marginalized in our society. For me, campus ministry is where the light of God's call for justice and peace pierces the shadowy veils of judgment with God's expansive, inclusive love.

God's come into the world not for judgment, but for liberation. Liberation from the shadows of hatred and strife. Liberation from the shadows of war and racism. Liberation from the shadows of sexism,

On who does God's light shine? On whom, perhaps I should say, does God's light shine?