

Chris Murphy

March 10th, 2024

Scripture: John 8: 12-20

Sermon Title: Reconnecting with the Light

Prayer...

Introduction:

This morning, we are continuing our sermon series on the book *The Rebirthing of God* by John Philip Newell. Today, we are looking at chapter 3, *Reconnecting with the Light*. In this chapter Newell takes us to another part of the island of Iona called the Hill of the Angels. In 2006, Karen and I went on our own hike to that part of the island, so I have a few photos to show you once again. Here they are...(Show Photos)

The reason this part of the island is called the Hill of the Angels is because legend has it that Columba, the founder of the monastic community on Iona, used to visit a particular hill to pray every evening at the setting of the sun. He always went alone to the hill to pray and he would not permit anyone to follow him. It was his

time of solitude. One day one of his young fellow monks became curious and chose to follow Columba anyway. This young monk hid behind a rock and witnessed, during Columba's prayer, angels of light ascending and descending around Columba.

When Karen and I visited this portion of Iona, I cannot say I saw any angels, but I am pretty sure I felt them there. John Philip Newell quotes a prayer of George Macleod, a Church of Scotland minister who was responsible for rebuilding the Iona community and Iona Abbey. Macleod wrote in one his prayers about Iona..."The grass is vibrant, the rocks pulsate...turn but a stone and an angel moves."

For Macleod, Newell, Columba, and many other pilgrims to the island, Iona has always been a thin place. In Celtic Christianity a thin place is where we see in creation briefly through the veil that separates heaven and earth. Newell reminds us that actually anywhere on earth we can experience a thin place if we are able to see the light of God in that place. One of my prayers for

Newberg First Presbyterian Church and our Newberg Peace Garden is that people from our community and beyond will come to this campus and by just walking either into our sanctuary or in our Peace Garden, they will experience the light and love of Christ. I want our campus to feel like a thin place, where the veil between heaven and earth feels very thin, where we feel and maybe even see from time to time angels ascending and descending. If you were around during Christmas, I shared with our congregation that occasionally in my faith experience I have seen and felt angels. One thing I have learned both from Scripture and my own experience is that angels are always with us to support our journey through this life and our journey into heaven. Like God, angels are always with us, but in our reason centered world that is sometimes prone to doubt God's existence, we have learned to doubt the existence of angels. We have learned to live our lives without much awareness of the light of Christ in our neighbor or the presence of God all around us. The good news is that we can unlearn some things and relearn what our Christian

heritage has taught us. We can relearn that this world is full of love and light and that creation is pulsating with the beauty of God. May we have eyes to see God's presence in her creation. May we open our eyes to see the angels, including the angels who come in human form when we are blessed by the kindness of others or when we serve one another.

One of the beautiful parts of Newell's chapter on Reconnecting with the Light are the poems that he shares of Mary Oliver. Mary Oliver is a famous poet who often focused on the theme of nature. She passed away in 2019 but was fortunate to live her life in great awe of God's light in creation. In one of her poems, she writes,

"Have you ever seen

Anything

In your life

More wonderful

Than the way the sun
Every evening
Relaxed and easy,
Floats towards the horizon

And in the clouds or the hills,
Or the ruffled sea,
And is gone---
And how it slides again

Out of the blackness,
Every morning,
On the other side of the world
Like a red flower

Streaming upward on its heavenly oils,
Say, on a morning in early summer,

At its perfect imperial distance---
And have you ever felt for anything

Such wild love---

Do you think there is anywhere, in any language,
A word billowing enough
For the pleasure

That fills you,
As the sun
Reaches out,
As it warms you.

As you stand there,
Empty-handed—
Or have you too
Turned from this world—

Or have you too

Gone crazy

For power

For things.

Mary Oliver reminds us that in creation is the beauty that opens our hearts to real life. In creation we experience the light of Christ, the presence of God when we see creation as full of the light of life.

In the Gospel of John chapter 8, we read today that Jesus is the light of the world and that those who follow him do not walk in darkness but have the light of life. The pharisees heard Jesus pronounce this about himself and they asked Jesus by what authority did he think that he was the light. Jesus said that by his own authority and by the witness of his Father in heaven one can trust that He is the light of the world.

I wonder if like the pharisees, we sometimes try to challenge Jesus. We are prone at times to doubt the light of Jesus in the world. By the way, when you read world, think creation. We at times fail to see the light of Christ in creation. We fail to acknowledge the light of Christ in each person, in the animals, in the trees, and flowers. We instead get caught up in feelings of anxiety, fear, and judgment. Before we engage our world, God's creation, we need to have eyes to see the presence of Christ everywhere.

Just as I said earlier that angels are all around us, so I believe God is all around us, not separate from God's creation but within her creation. The light of Christ is here, but we need eyes to see the light.

Now I understand that God's creation, our world, the cosmos experiences evil. I know some of you here and many others in our world are going through great turmoil and pain. To embrace the

light of Jesus in God's creation is not to deny the presence of evil, but here is how the light of Jesus works.

When you look at a person, let us say someone who is under some form of suffering, such as an addiction, we first see that person as a child of God. We recognize that person has the light of Christ within her or him, even if he or she does not feel that way. Then in our compassion we also come alongside our sister or brother and shine the light of Christ as we show compassion to our friend. Then as we show compassion, we realize that God is also present showing compassion. As we pray, the Holy Spirit anointing touches that person's life and begins to bring healing. The angels also come alongside to provide comfort. With addictions, healing may not come immediately and will likely involve further support like an accountability program such as AA or Celebrate Recovery. It will likely be helpful to have ongoing therapy and other relational support, including prayer support.

The key is when we engage a world in pain that we recognize that the light of Christ is within creation and is relationally connecting with creation. The light of Christ is always the source of love and healing in our world. The world has evil, but the substance of the world is not evil, the substance of the world is inherently good.

Deep down there is light and beauty in all creation. Humanity may become lost and distorted, but we are never inherently evil. For this reason, I do not think it is ever helpful to call another person evil. People can do evil things and there are evil powers in the world, but we must never call another person or any created thing evil. We must never think of ourselves as inherently evil. No friends, this does not please God. As followers of Jesus, we must shine the light of Christ and his love to the world and help the world see her beauty and her deep goodness. Only then will the world be able to also see its vulnerability and seek healing. If we treat one another as evil, there will never be healing. When people feel they are being judged and not listened to, they become defensive and sometimes aggressive or even violent.

Celtic Christianity reminds us to see the light of Christ everywhere in creation and to partner with God in bringing healing to the world. Friends do not see the world as separate from God's heart nor innately opposed to God. The world may be broken and influenced by evil, but it remains deep down deeply good and full of light. When we see the world in its beauty, we will have the proper perspective to partner with God in bringing healing to the parts of the world in pain and to use the light of love to stand against the powers of evil.

How do you feel today about the invitation to reconnect with the light? In what way may Jesus be inviting us today to find comfort in seeing him as the light of the world and the one who brings the light of life. Do we have eyes to see his light in one another, in creation, in a stranger, in a person of another faith, in a person of a different culture, in a person of a different political party? Do we see the light of Christ everywhere or do we judge some parts of this world as devoid of God. Do we look at our own hearts and

feel only judgement or do we embrace that we are full of light because we are created in God's image. As the light of Christ reveals areas of need, we may wish to confess our pain and sometimes our sin as well, but may we also embrace our goodness and light. When we do love ourselves in this way, God smiles. When we see the beauty of this world and see the beauty in another person, God smiles. She smiles like a mother who is happy when her children say I am sorry and give each other a hug. She smiles because she is the mother of all of creation and she sees her children as beautiful, even when they sometimes hurt one another. God smiles because she is a loving mother even as he is a nurturing father.

Do you see the light of Christ? As we continue to move through lent and approach Holy week later this month, I am already anticipating the angels who will be present at the resurrection of Jesus. I am already excited to remember the light of the

resurrection. John Philip Newell invites us to see the light. He says,

“It is a Light that is forever waiting to come forth again in new ways. To reconnect to that Light- in our individual families, communities, and religious traditions—will again be to bear blessing to the world. We are invited to pay attention, to see the Light that is at the heart of this moment and every moment, to know that we are full of light and can shine...”

Friends, whatever sorrows we are facing, whatever pain exists in this created world, the resurrection reminds us that the light of Christ shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome the light. The light of Christ continues to shine like the sun. In Newberg, sometimes the rain feels gentle and kind and sometimes the darkness of the rain and clouds might bring us down, but when the sun comes out, we remember that the sun is always shining and eventually reveals herself to her creation.

Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

AMEN.

John 8:12-20

Jesus the Light of the World

12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." 13 Then the Pharisees said to him, "You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid." 14 Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. 15 You judge by human standards;^[a] I judge no one. 16 Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid, for it is not I alone who judge but I and the Father^[b] who sent me. 17 In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. 18 I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf." 19 Then they said to him, "Where is your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also." 20 He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.