

“Trusting God”
Stouffville United Church
Sunday, March 22, 2020
Rev Elizabeth Cunningham

Ephesians 5:8-14

Normally the celebration of the First Day of Spring on Thursday, March 19 would take more notice from the world. But not this year, as wave after wave of Covid-19 reality continues to change our way of being together, deeply impacting our daily life, and our work and home routines. Grocery shelves are empty; closures are resulting in layoffs; and the economy is taking an enormous hit. Worry, fear, and loneliness haunt our days.

While we are usually excited by the longer hours of sunlight with the coming of Spring, they feel darker somehow. This dualism between light and dark is a prevalent metaphor in our church year. Advent is a season where we mark the coming of the light, in the birth of Jesus. And our Advent worship begins with traditional words: “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”

The journey through Lent, where we are at the moment, is a growing awareness of the darkness that is beginning to surround Jesus as he journeys to Jerusalem, and to the cross. And we know that darkness covered the sky when he gave his final breath from the cross, died and was buried in the tomb. As the stone was rolled across the entrance to the tomb, the world fell into darkness. For three days, the world lived in that darkness.

Some churches celebrate what is called the first light of Easter, known as the Easter Vigil. In that precious service, while the world is still quiet in the darkness of night, faithful followers gather in the darkness of early morning and build a small fire – which is called the first light. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. They light a candle from that fire, and then enter their worship space, still in darkness, but with the light leading their way, they sing three times these words, ‘The Light of Christ’.

As the writer of Ephesians says, “Everything exposed by the light becomes visible.” (5:13) As Christians, the light of Christ comes into your life when you believe in Christ and you are transformed by that light. That light is then refracted through you, shining into spaces of darkness you cannot see. This light is like no other light that I have at in my household, like a lamp or a flashlight or a candle. The light of Christ is like no other light than can run out of battery, or fail, or fade, or be snuffed out. The light we celebrate in the early light of Easter morning is a light that *has broken out* of darkness. It doesn’t just turn on, but it **breaks out** of the darkness. Jesus Christ broke the bonds of death to emerge as Christ Triumphant, the light of the world.

Have you ever watched those time lapse videos of a seed germinating? It has a similar energy– where the emerging plant breaks through the casing of the seed, and begins to push upwards, through the soil, through the dirt, to what it can’t see but knows is there – the light.

In our darkness of Covid-19, in our fear, in our anxiety, in our unrest, our faith reaches out, like the seed in the soil, towards what we cannot see, but we know is there – the Light of Christ. And we reach out in faith, in surety, in trust. We may feel buried in the soil, in the dirt, in the mud of these days. But we rise up from the darkness to the light of Christ. Like a seed reaching through the soil to the light, we reach up to his love.

Remember the verse from Ephesians: “Everything exposed by the light becomes visible.” (5:13) With churches shuttered and closed by the coronavirus, so many churches are beginning to broadcast their worship services to the world, on Facebook live, zoom, or other means. We’re all coming out into the light. What was once inside the 4 walls is now outside. As a fb post read, “With church doors shutting across Canada, it is time for us to show that the church has never been about the building. WE are the church!” And you, as you sit in your homes watching this worship service, you too are pushing up and out to what you can’t see but know is there – your church, your congregation, your friends.

Our passage from Ephesians ends with a remnant from a hymn for an ancient baptismal ceremony: Rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.

Rise from the sadness
Rise from the worry
Rise from the weariness

To be lifted up by each other,
To sing psalms and hymns and spiritual song,
To revel in the affirmation and joy
that this community brings to your heart

The light shines in the darkness
and the darkness has not overcome it.

Thanks be to God. Amen.