

## An Advent Meditation

St. David's Episcopal Church - December 18, 2019

With the inexorable movement of our planet Earth around the Sun, we are now within three days of the Winter Solstice - the event where we will experience the least amount of daylight within a 24 hour period - what we commonly call "the shortest day of the year."

Simultaneously with this physical phenomena, our liturgical, theologically-oriented calendar in this Advent season also focuses upon the intriguing interplay of *light and darkness*, as these phenomena move ever-so quietly, yet also, ever-so powerfully within our lives.

Our Hebrew prophet ancestors writing from a perspective of the deeply-felt and dark despair of living as captives in a foreign land, utilized these images of *despair and darkness* as they wrote and spoke in multiple attempts to wrestle with the haunting question of "where was God" within their lives.

The *darkness* of despair can come in variant forms and experiences within all of our lives; being captive in a foreign land isn't simply a geographical locale. Foreign lands have psychological and emotional addresses also. Thus our identity with our Hebrew ancestors in periodic desires and searching for *hope and light* within our lives is echoed in the prayerful-expectancy contained within the hymn, "O come, O

come Immanuel, and ransom captive Israel who sits in lonely exile here.”

Less foreboding than the darkness and despair of exile and captivity in a foreign land, yet powerfully daunting none-the-less is what we often reference as the *darkness of ignorance* or “not-knowing.”

We expend significant effort and resources as we seek for lamps that provides the *light of learning*, where acquired information can then be honed and sharpened upon the pumice stone of life’s experiences, so that by acquiring a cutting-edge of knowledge, that knowledge can then be utilized and tested within the course of life’s multiple experiences, with the result that we may be gifted with the *lighted gift of wisdom*.

Thus, it is from our Judaeo-Christian heritage that we value and affirm the word of the Psalmist that “*by the judgements of the Lord is your servant enlightened, and in the keeping of them there is great reward.*”

Through the work of the psychiatrist, Carl Jung, and persons oriented to his perceptions and understandings, I believe that we have been assisted to better understand the *darkness* that we, as humans, often inhabit when we act out of a desire to protect the idealized and valued projections of the Self - i.e., the Ego.

When we defensively attempt to project outward to others - the self-image we value - it is in doing so that we invariably tend to pull down around us the curtains of rationalization and pretense - and thereby in effect, create within ourselves *a darkness - a shadow* that is often devoid of grace and self-acceptance; *a darkness - a shadow* that is often fueled from our anxieties and fears.

A radio program that I recall as a young child would begin each week with a haunting voice asking the question, “*what evil lurks within the heart of man?*” And the equally, haunting response would be, “*the Shadow knows.*”

One of the most freeing and *enlightening* experiences of life can be when we are able to draw upon the willingness and courage to face, embrace, and learn from “*our shadow selves*” - an experience that can enable the *light of grace and self-acceptance* to begin their healing work and to make experientially real within us the truth of the ancient scripture that “*the light has come into the world and the darkness has not overcome it.*”

This dance and the interplay of *light and darkness* in their multiple forms and experiences is a life-long-given and a constant within our life experiences.

In a few days, we will sing a song that I wish to suggest encapsulates the totality of what I've attempted to share in these thoughts.

The song was originally a poem written on Christmas Day in 1863 by a distraught father, whose young son, Charles Applegate Longfellow, had left earlier that year - without parental permission - to enlist and fight with the Union Army, and who a few months later was critically wounded at the Battle of New Hope in Virginia.

As Henry Wadsworth Longfellow put pen to paper on that Christmas Day of 1863, can the surging, pulsating feelings of *darkness and light* - the back-and-forth movement from despair to hope, as they interplay and dance from Longfellow's heart onto the page - become a means whereby we too can also reflect and perceive from within our periods of darkness and from within our world's events - the sustaining promise of the light that brings grace, healing, hope, and comfort - *the Light that shall prevail*.

I heard the bells on Christmas Day  
Their old, familiar carols play,  
    and wild and sweet  
    The words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,

The belfries of all Christendom  
    Had rolled along  
    The unbroken song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,  
The world revolved from night to day,  
    A voice, a chime,  
    A chant sublime  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth  
The cannon thundered in the South,  
    And with the sound  
    The carols drowned  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent  
The hearthstones of a continent,  
    And made forlorn  
    The households born  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;  
“Their is no peace on earth,” I said;

For hate is strong,  
And mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
“God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;  
The Wrong shall fail,  
The Right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good-will to men.”