

Chaos or Christ: Hope in a Chaotic World

John 1:1-14

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It was a large impressive waiting room, furnished with the finest of furniture and stocked with the latest magazines. On this particular day, it was packed full of people waiting to see one of three physicians. In the corner of that packed waiting room there sat an elderly lady crying. At first she wept softly, but as the hopes and fears of all of her years began to burst inside of her she began to weep openly. People sitting in that waiting room did what nice people tend to do. They tried to ignore what was going on. They hid behind magazines and newspapers and pretended not to notice so as not to embarrass her. However, there was a little kid sitting in a chair playing with toys he had found in his mother's purse and nobody had told him how to be polite. So, he put his toys down and toddled out of his chair and over to the elderly lady. When he got to her he reached up with his hand and touched her on the cheek to dry her tears and said, "It's alright, it's alright. Everything's going to be alright." And the lady smiled.

Simply stated, yet mysteriously pondered, the essence of Christmas is this: The King of kings and the Lord of lords climbed down out of His throne in glory and toddled into our world as a tiny child touching us where we hurt the most, saying to us in the midst of our lives, "It's alright, it's alright." Even when everything is all wrong, it can be alright.

In a world of fear and darkness

Came a light as bright as day

To drive away the sin and sadness

He came to show the way

And the people called him Jesus, He was a man for all times.

Just a simple man called Jesus, but didn't He love and

didn't He shine.

When John told his gospel, he didn't talk about manglers and babies. He talked about the creator of the world who now in the person of Jesus Christ comes as a light shining in the darkness. And the darkness can never put it out. What a word for our day.

All of us seem to date our lives now in light of that terrible September day when time, itself, stood still. Alan Jackson and his current hit asks,

"Where were you when the world stopped turning on that September day?

Teaching a class full of innocent children

Or driving down some interstate.

Did you feel guilty because you were a survivor?

In a crowded room did you feel all alone?

Did you call up your mother and tell her you loved her?

Did you dust off the Bible at home?"

Some of us even dared to ask where God might have been when the world seemed so vulnerable to sin? Was He trying to destroy us or trying to save us when we felt so much fear back then? Well, Christmas comes to poke holes in the darkness with a grand, glorious affirmation. Immanuel. God is with us. He was there in the tower of a smoke-filled room when a man called his wife to say good-bye. He was aboard every plane and there to hear each person when they started to cry. Tonight we proclaim His wondrous and glorious birth and the profound truth that light shines in the darkness and the darkness will never put it out.

You have in your hands tonight a candle. Would you just take that candle and look at it for a moment. Compared to bombs bursting in air and buildings exploding before our eyes, this candle seems tiny and insignificant doesn't it. Yet there is an old Quaker saying that goes, "If you want to destroy the darkness, then just light a candle." It will do it every time.

Take a long look at the candle before you. Notice it has a wick right in the middle of it. What is a candle without a wick? Well, just either hot or cold wax, which will never burn in any way or form. At the core of your being, more basic to you than the bread you will break with your family tomorrow, is an image of God. Don't ever forget that deep center of yourself.

God created human beings in His own image. He breathed into us the breath of life. You belong to God and whether or not it is clear to you, He brought you to this place tonight. He loves you with an everlasting love and He wants you to become all that you were created to be.

This candle I hold has been burned before. Some of you have been burned before, haven't you? In reality, when you have been burned before, sometimes it is hard to find the wick. You have got to scrape it off a little bit and dig around in it until you get down far enough that you can begin to discover the wick so you can let the light come to you. I say to you tonight, whatever the circumstances of your life have been, wherever your life has led you, or failed to lead you, dig around tonight until you find the center, the dead center of your soul, none other than God himself.

There is something else about this candle. You cannot light it by yourself. Unless you are smarter than I am, you cannot light it by yourself. You can rub it this way. You can turn it upside down. You can twist it. You can pitch it up in the air. Do anything you want with, but it is not going to light, is it? The light must come from the outside in order to light a candle. Oh, my friends, when are we going to learn? The source of our light is outside of us. The paradox of time is that we have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often. We have learned how to make a living, but have we learned how to make a life? We have been all the way to the moon and back, but we still have trouble crossing the street to meet our new neighbors. We have conquered outer space, but how are you doing with the inner space of your life. We have cleaned up the air, but have we cleaned up our souls? We split the atom,

but we have not conquered our prejudices. We have got fancier houses, but more broken homes. So, maybe it is time we got more concerned about the stockroom than the showroom and concentrated on quality as well as quantity. Maybe it is time to add life to our years, instead of just years to our lives. The light of Christ must come from the outside.

Will you receive the light of Christ into your life tonight? The light, is shining in the darkness and the darkness will never, never put it out. Of course, light received is meant to be shared, is it not? Isn't that at the core of what we believe? Some of us learned it in Sunday School.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine

Let it shine, let it shine.

Matthew 5:14 says, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand, and it gives light to everybody in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people that they may see your good works and praise God in heaven." Maybe it is time to let the light shine in life.

The time is right. If ever it was right, the time is right, right now for the light of goodness to shine on earth down in the trenches, where it is hard and difficult. Down in the daily-ness of life, where you make tough decisions everyday. It is time for unusual goodness to take place.

There was a pastor that set out to build a deck on the back of his house. Every day he would go out in the afternoon and try to work on it and the neighbor kid would come over and watch him. The kid wouldn't say anything. He would just watch him build. The pastor tried to strike up a conversation, but the little kid did not have anything to say. After a couple of days, the pastor said, "Do you hope you'll be a builder one day when you grow up?" The little kid said, "Nope."

The pastor said, “Then why are you watching me build every day?” He says, “Well, I just want to see what a pastor does when he smashes his finger instead of the nail. I want to see what kind of response he makes.” The daily-ness of life, the routines, where it is hard.

As our founder John Wesley said, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, to all the people you can, for as long as you can.” Light a candle tonight. Light a candle of goodness wherever you are. Light a candle tonight.

Light a candle of hope for a dark world. Hope is to the soul what oxygen is to the body, absolutely essential. Without oxygen, the body suffocates. Without hope, the soul drops into despair. But whatever the circumstances of life may be, people have discovered that powerful and unending hope they turn to again and again.

Gerald Coffee in his book, “Beyond Survival,” talks about Christmas as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. “It was my third Christmas there,” he says. “and I took the foil paper, the tin foil off a tiny piece of candy that I’d been given. And I made a star out of it and I hung it above my bed. And on Christmas Day, I lay there and looked at that little foil wrapped star. Suddenly I realized that here I was, stripped of everything by which I measured my identity, my rank, my uniform, my money, my family. In spite of losing all of that, I continued to find strength and hope because the enemy could not take my hope away. And I would hold it, whatever the day. I realized that although I was hurting, lonely and scared, this might be the most significant Christmas I’ve ever had.” That is hope. That is hope that you and I have tonight. Light a candle. Light a candle of hope in a dark world.

Light a candle tonight. Light a candle of love in a world that needs to know love. Not selfish love. Not “what am I going to get for Christmas,” but “what may I give to somebody else in order that the world may be better?” That is mature love.

An old man who lived too long and had become cynical, was walking down the beach when he noticed a little boy in front of him. When he got closer, he discovered what the boy was doing. The kid was picking up starfish off the beach and throwing them back into the ocean. The cynical man walked up to the kid and said, "What are you doing?" The boy said, "I am saving starfish." "But," said the cynical man, "the beach goes on for miles and miles and there are millions and millions of starfish. What difference does it make?" The little kid reached down, picked up one more starfish, tossed it into the ocean and simply said, "Well, it makes a difference to that one."

No one of us in this room can do everything, but all of us in this place can do something that the light may shine in the world.

*At the spot God has placed you
Begin at once, to do
Little things that brighten up
The lives surrounding you.
For if everybody brightened up
The spot on which they are standing,
By being more considerate
And a little less demanding.
This dark old world would very soon
Eclipse the "evening star."
If everybody brightened up
The corner where they are.*

The light is shining in the darkness and the darkness will never put it out, because the spirit of Christ so empowers people and has for centuries that they would dare to let their light shine. On this Christmas I say to you tonight, maybe more than ever before, Let not your life be shaped by chaos! Let your life be enlightened by Christ. Amen

