

## **Light and Love**

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Trinity Church in the City of Boston  
Third Sunday of Advent  
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I speak to you in the name of the light that has come and is always coming, Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

It was a crisp cold evening in mid-December just about this time of year. The sun had just set and the little boy was walking to his best friend's house for dinner. As the light faded and the darkness came on, the first star appeared and it looked huge to him. As he looked at it he was seized with excitement. As fast as his sturdy little six-year old legs could take him, he began to run. Running as fast as he could, to see his friend, to tell his friend, Tommy, what he had seen. He's seen the star, star of wonder, star of light. But near the top step he slipped and fell. Fell on his face, or more accurately on the side of his face and there was a slice of skin taken out at the corner of his left eye by the stone steps. Despite the hurt, despite the blood, he was still so excited to Tommy about the star that he rushed into the house and blurted out, "I've seen it, I've seen the star, come out and see it with me Tommy." But Tommy's father was a practical man and a doctor, and he said, "Not so fast young man. Looks like you've had a nasty scrape there. Let's take a look at that cut by your eye." So as he told his friend all about the star and wondered aloud, "could this be the same star that led people so long ago to Jesus?" Tommy's father cleaned the wound, butterfly-banded it and they settled down at the table for dinner. Outside the star kept on shining and it kept shining out of the corner of the little boy's eye right near the bandage.

What excitement, eager to share the good news, the good news, what good news? Well, the light is here, the light is good, come to the light. It's not just that little boy who's seen that light. Every single one of us here, we've had a glimpse of it, however fleeting, or we wouldn't be here. Or perhaps, one of more of you are here today because you want to see that light for the first time and you've come looking and hoping. But whatever has brought you here, God knows your heart's desire and your eagerness to see that light more clearly and to love the light more dearly, and perhaps most importantly, to love it without fear.

But our lives are a little bit like the life of Tommy's friend, aren't they? Even when we catch a glimpse of the light and feel its powerful warmth rising within us, things can go wrong, things can knock us off our feet, discouraging us, filling us with fear and maybe even holding us back from sharing the light. I'd like you to think with me this morning about three different kinds of fear that hold us from sharing that the light is coming and indeed has come. And I would also like you to think with me about ways that those fears need not control us.

First, the fear that if I share my excitement about the light, I'll look like a fool. Second, the fear that I don't really know enough about the light to talk to others about it. Third,

the fear that if I try to share it; to share my excitement and the glory of the light; I'll somehow do it wrong and I won't succeed.

First, the fear of looking like a fool. Sometimes I think we fear that our enthusiasm will just bleed all over the place and cause trouble for ourselves and others and embarrassment too. And that they won't get caught up in our enthusiasm and real joy about the light and that we will simply end looking like a fool.

Well, John the Baptist seems to have mastered that fear and maybe he can be our model. If anyone ever looked like a fool, it was John. Remember how he dressed? Camel's skin, not a camel's hair coat, camel's skin. And remember his diet? Locusts, mmmmmmm. And what did he do? He stood in a river and preached. Talk about looking like a fool. But John doesn't seem to have minded. Somehow whatever fear he might have had about being a fool, he overcame. How do you suppose he did that and how might we learn from him? I think that John had caught fire from the fiery light that he had come to proclaim. He knew the most important thing that a human being can know, and that is that the One who was coming from God, the One he had come to proclaim was all love. And he knew that that One would set the whole world afire with His love and that the light of that love would never go out. Compared to knowing that, John was willing to risk anything. He knew he only had to do one thing for those people then, and for us now and that's to wash away whatever stands in the way of our catching fire.

So what does that mean for us? Well, some part of you, like John, has already caught fire, it may be a barely burning coal right now, but some part of you has caught fire or wants to or you wouldn't be here. The way to let that love, that light grow in you and in me is to get clear about what it is that we love. What piece of the all love that is Jesus the Christ has gotten us and set a fire blazing. Maybe its Jesus as healer that has really caught your imagination and set a fire burning in you. Maybe He's bandaged your impaired vision and you're grateful. Or maybe Jesus as the teacher, the One who knows how to illuminate even the darkest of your nights, maybe that's what set you afire. Or Jesus as liberator, the One who says; "You know, I don't care whether other people despise you and tell you, you aren't right. To me you are just fine the way you are. I love you." Maybe that's what's caught fire in you. Or maybe the Jesus, who is Comforter, whose comforted you in your moment of loss. The loss of a parent, the loss of a job, the loss of a spouse or a lover. The Jesus who can strengthen you to go on. Let this Jesus love you and set that little coal inside you burning more brightly and your fear of foolishness, like John's, will burn away.

The second fear, the fear that we don't know enough to share with others about this light, this love. That we are not the experts, that we need another degree or need to study just a little further, or need, well you fill in the blank with what you think you need. Let me say clearly to you that you do not need a Ph.D. in Physics to teach others about this kind of light. Nor do you need a Ph.D. in Psychology or a doctorate in divinity to speak to others about this kind of love. This light and this love are their own authority. This light, this love, you saw what happened to John, they came asking him for his credentials, they wanted him to prove that he had the right to speak about this light and this love. "Are you

the Messiah? Is that what gives you the right to do this?" "No, I'm not," he said calmly. "What then, are you Elijah?" "No, not Elijah either." "What about it, maybe you're the prophet, the one like Moses we were taught to expect." "No, not that either," he said calmly. He knew the only thing he needed to know. He knew that his role was simple and though he might not be worthy to untie the thong of the coming One's sandals, he was worthy, and so are you, to speak about the light and love that come through that coming One. That light and that love are their own authority.

And the last fear, the fear that I won't do it right, that I won't succeed in sharing the light. Once again, John is our model. If you think that Jesus had a brief ministry, John's was even briefer. Maybe a few months, a few months two thousand years ago and we are still singing hymns about him? And he was a failure in the world's eyes, you know. In case you don't remember the story, he got his head chopped off by the local potentate and he became the butt of a dinner joke with his head served up on a platter. Not exactly a success story. But here we are two thousand years later celebrating the light and love that he came to proclaim, oh so briefly. Think what difference it will make if you share with just one person, just one person, what you know of Jesus light and love. I'll wager that if you do, if you do, the light and the love of Jesus will keep burning brightly in at least one other heart and then down through the ages.

If you are wondering, ok, how do I do this? This is where Isaiah's lesson comes in. Have you brought just one piece of good news to somebody else? If you know that you are loved despite everything, have you told just one other person? If you haven't yet, you still can. Have you bound up one broken heart? Someone who has lost someone or something that matters? Did you listen? If you haven't yet, you still can. Have you helped to repair one little piece of one ruined city? New Orleans? Boston? New York? If you haven't, you still can. And if you and I do that, then the light and love that John came to proclaim burns on. Thanks be to God that the love and light of Jesus Christ burning in John and in us, lights the whole world now and forevermore. Amen.