

Light in the Darkness

John 3:16-21

by the Rev. Dr. E. Scott Jones
First Central Congregational UCC
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In the midst of our darkness, Jesus proclaims that God is giving us light and life and love and that this is our salvation.

We will not perish because eternal life, life that is timeless and everlasting, is offered to us as a gift from God.

“Eternal livingness” is what Jurgen Moltmann calls it. And his descriptions get more and more wonderful. He writes,

“It is at the same time a life that *begins* every moment, and an awakening vitality, provided that we look to the future and welcome the possibilities of the new morning.”

He writes that it is not “length of life” but the “depth of experience in the moment” — “the fulfilled moment is like an atom of eternity, and its illumination is like a spark of the eternal light.”

Nor is this life something which we must wait for, something which comes after our death. Eternal life is experienced here, on earth, in our human existence. Moltmann writes that we experience it in wonder and delight, in contemplation of God and intellectual curiosity, in creativity and imagination, in passionate love and sexual pleasure. It is our joy in living and most clearly present when we love.

He writes, “It is love which makes life truly living. “Delight in a life we love,” is what he calls “eternal life.”

And we already learned this if we realized the purpose of the story about Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana. God wants us to enjoy life, to delight in it, to have abundance of living. That is what it means to say that God loves us. That is the gift of light in our darkness. That is our salvation.

As Warren Carter writes, “Those who believe in Jesus already have eternal life. Already now they participate in a life free from what is contrary to and opposes God’s purposes.”

To believe in Jesus, then, is finally to say “Yes” to life. To commit ourselves, entrust ourselves, all ourselves with God’s love and desire for us. To turn away from all the forces in ourselves and in human society which lead to death and darkness and broken relationships. And turn instead to all that God hopes and dreams for us. To come into the light, to live, and to love.

In 1961 after Dag Hammarskjold, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, died in a mysterious plane crash while on a peace mission in the Congo, it was discovered that he had kept a spiritual journal since he was a young man. This was a surprise to the general public and even to many of Hammarskjold’s close friends, who were unaware that he was a deeply

spiritual man.

They knew him to be a man of peace and diplomacy, who worked tirelessly to create a new international order governed by law and respect. He as an activist Secretary-General over his eight years in the office, negotiating many deals and preventing many crises from erupting. And he wasn't afraid to stand up to the great powers, including the United States.

This spiritual journal is entitled *Markings* and quickly became a classic, revealing a uniquely modern perspective on faith. For Hammarskjold was highly educated and had a skeptical mind, which led him early in life to reject the religious faith in which he had been raised. He also was fully acquainted with the darkness of human nature and the great evil we are capable of. He lived during a time in which intellectuals were struggling to find any meaning in life. But through his adult life and during his career as a diplomat helping to rebuild Europe and establish a new order after the ravages of the Second World War his experiences led him to reflect upon religious faith.

James McClendon writes about Hammarskjold, "His fear of faith had been twofold: that it might be dishonest, and that it might be another, monumental form of egocentricity, the very opposite of a life of unselfish service."

From a journal entry in 1951 we learn that what drew him back to Jesus was that Jesus committed his life to divine possibilities and was absolutely faithful to those, even when they led to his crucifixion. Jesus, in other words, said Yes to life. And Hammarskjold realized that to be a follower of Jesus was also to say Yes to life, to commit oneself to divine possibilities and to be faithful in seeing them through. It was this which gave him the courage and the power to fulfill his tasks as Secretary-General.

Fully aware of the darkness in humanity and even of the shadow parts of his own self, Hammarskjold wrote that "To say Yes to life is at one and the same time to say Yes to oneself," even that part of oneself which most resists the light.

Hammarskjold reminds us: the salvation that Jesus announces we can find in God's love is not egocentric or wish fulfillment or ignorant of the complexities of human nature. Rather, it embraces all of who we are while also working to cultivate the best within us. And it is fully aware that sometimes when we choose to live eternal life, that the darkness of the world will fight back against us. As it did to Jesus and as it did to Hammarskjold.

But this in no way lessens the good news that this is the way of salvation.

Hammarskjold wrote,

. . . You are *one* in God, and
God is wholly in you,
just as, for you, He is wholly in all you meet.
With this faith, in prayer you descend into yourself to meet the Other,
in the steadfastness and light of this union,
see that all things stand, like yourself, alone before God.
and that each of your acts is an act of creation, conscious, because you are a human
being with human responsibilities, but governed, nevertheless, by the power beyond
human consciousness which has created man.
You are liberated from things, but you encounter in them an experience which has the

purity and clarity of revelation.

In the faith which is "God's marriage to the soul," *everything* therefore, has a meaning. So live, then, that you may use what has been put into your hand

My dear friends, this good news is really quite simple. Believe in Jesus. Come away from the darkness and enter the light. Say Yes to life, and the love of God will lead you unto salvation.