

The Light of the World
John 1:1-14
First Presbyterian Church
December 25, 2016
Rev. Glen Bell

I love that song! Go, tell it on the mountain! We get ourselves up to the highest mountain, to the rooftop, to wherever we find ourselves, to sing and shout and proclaim that Jesus Christ is born!

The first few verses of John's Gospel remind us that these are tidings worth singing and shouting, because this is cosmic news, earth-shattering news, news beyond time and space and matter.

In the very beginning, before anything, God was and is. What became through the Logos, the Word, through God the Son, Jesus Christ, is life and light. This life was the light of all people. This life is the meaning of all creation, the purpose for all humanity. This life really is life.

This, this, isn't simply about gifts or tree or carols. This is the true light that blesses and guides the whole world.

So go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere! Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is Lord!

But Christmas isn't all singing and shouting. It is not all beyond time and space and matter.

No, verses five to eight and ten and eleven get real. It ain't all good news. It ain't all cosmic. It ain't all easy. The light shines, but it shines amid the darkness. Jesus came into the world, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to the very people he had created, but we rejected him.

Perhaps we see this most clearly in these middle verses about John the Baptist. He was sent from God; he was a witness to the light; he testified the great Good News. But it wasn't all about him. He himself was not the light.

This is Christmas news for all of us, in the midst of the everyday questions and challenges and difficulties of life. It may be hard to hear, because we want a bright, shiny Christmas, cosmic and beautiful. Sometimes we get tired of bearing the name of Christ and Christmas out in the world, for it demands we work for justice and peace, that we involve ourselves in the work of giving and forgiving. No, we just want to sing the refrain of that carol over and over again.

Go, tell it on the mountain! Go, tell it on the mountain! Go, tell it on the mountain!

But we have to remember the verses too. The shepherds feared and trembled when angels ringed the earth. Down in a lowly manger the humble Christ was born.

You see, these words about John are also words about you and me. We are sent out into the world by God. We are witnesses to the light; we testify the great Good News.

But it's not about us. It is never only about us.

Right near the end of this passage, in verse twelve, you and I discover a fascinating promise. To all who receive Jesus, who trust in his name, God gives power. God gives us the power to become and be and live as children of God. At Christmas, we are given the power to follow Jesus.

Erica Wimber Avena lives in East Lyme, Connecticut. She writes this about power.

"Our church was next door to a group home for adults. One day one of them came in and sat down before worship, uninvited. She was painfully overweight and wearing clothing that didn't fit. She hadn't bathed and wasn't able to breathe or even more comfortably. She wouldn't speak or make eye contact with anyone.

“From the beginning, she tried our patience. More than once she forgot where she was and lit up a cigarette right there on the pew. She fell asleep during sermons. Her breathing problems escalated and became loud snoring problems.

“You can imagine the conversations. ‘She doesn’t belong here; she couldn’t possibly be getting anything out of it so heavily medicated.’ ‘I’m tithing to this church, and she’s just giving pennies – she shouldn’t be allowed to ruin it for everyone.’ Some observed that she ate too many cookies at coffee hour.

“Finally, a member said she’d had enough. She announced that she would make a friend of our troubled visitor and sit next to her in church. When the snoring started, she gave her a gentle nudge. She helped her find the right hymn to sing; she reminded her to put her cigarettes away; she limited her to no more than three cookies in the fellowship hall.

“Soon I saw our visitor beginning to talk with people. She made eye contact and learned to shake my hand at the door after worship. Her first words to me were ‘bless you.’

“Some months later I received a phone call from the woman’s social worker. He told me that she had never been accepted by any group or able to sustain a single positive relationship until she started coming to our church. ‘Thank you for welcoming her,’ he said to me. ‘I have never been to your church, but I know that it is an exceptional place.’ After I hung up the phone I sat for a moment.

“Empowered, this woman went on to make friends with the others in her group home and she brought them all with her to church. She had gained her whole life back. She had put her demons behind her. She told anyone who would listen what the Lord had done for her.”

Sisters and brothers, you and I are given power at Christmas to love and love and love and love. So go tell it on the mountain. Jesus Christ is born.