

Mar 3, '18, Anthon UMC, Luke 9:28-36, "Let There Be Light"  
By Pastor Sheryl K Ashley

Who here longs for more light? God said, "Let there be light and there was light." Good words. God's words. First words recorded as spoken by our heavenly Creator. No one, not even God in whom there is no darkness at all and who sees all, prefers darkness to light. I personally say those words "Let there be light!" more often lately as it seems I need more light to do most anything, but sleep. I've got little lights shining here and there all over the house just to avoid stubbing my toe getting up at night. Darkness may serve its purpose but darkness is a void that is too easily filled with the negative. So, God filled it the very first thing with light and a lovely creation all for us and gave it to us to tend and nurture. Soon thereafter we managed to try to circumvent God's light by choosing to be our own light source which got us flickered out of the garden with the help of the Prince of Darkness.

But God the light-giver and our life-giver kept shining his way upon us always working to let there be light. He set forth a way for us to find peace with him in giving us the 10 commandments through Moses and by sending several outstanding prophets like Elijah. Thus, we had the light of his rules of obedience in hard copy...a very hard, hardcopy. However, in moments of darkness and in futile attempts to perfectly obey those rules we tended

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to break them, chip them, reshape their meaning and worst of all ignore them. Darkness still remained stretching out the distance between us and God.

And so, God, in a last-ditch rescue effort to turn on the light in a plan that had been set in motion from the beginning sent His Son Jesus. Jesus, the light of the world, Jesus, who is the loving heart of God himself, wrapped in human flesh came to enlighten us.

God's holy light is hard on the eyes. People couldn't look at God's reflected light from Moses' face when he was given the 10 commandments so Moses, had to wear a veil to protect the people waiting down below the mountain from being blinded from the glory of it.

And here in today's Gospel we see Moses and the great prophet Elijah once again enveloped in the light of God. These two heroes of the faith are fresh sent from heaven, long after their physical deaths, as a support system for Jesus, Jesus shining with the light of the Father is about to embark on the rescue mission of all times. This mission will end on the cross with the earth being shrouded in darkness, but emerging in a lighting bright resurrection victory over sin and death. Once in a while God's light escapes heaven and shines through us. It comes every time there is a person who lets God's light shine through their lives. Every time obedience

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happens that shows sacrificial love, God's love shines out and we catch a glimpse of heaven's light. It is then God is saying, "Let there be light."

At this mountaintop experience which shone out Jesus' glory, it was as if God could not hold back his pleasure and his blessing and his glory from showing through. On this mountaintop, Jesus' flesh and blood body could not hide this glory and our Father was there strengthening his son for the seemingly impossible task ahead.

Note that this all happened while Jesus was praying. Prayer is the powerful window that opens God's presence and power to us and we neglect it to our own peril. How often have we fallen asleep rather than pray for God's light to shine on some darkness in our own lives? The disciples fell asleep more than one occasion. Peter James and John were the chosen three to be in this particular place of power with Jesus. A sentence that speaks to me here is this: "...they were weighed down with sleep but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood there with him." Falling asleep rather than staying awake in God's presence would have caused them to miss one of the most enlightening moments recorded in our Bibles. Even Jesus, especially Jesus, did not enter into a challenging situation of obeying God without prayer power. Hold onto that as I progress further in my message.

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This is no time for us to fall asleep especially for the church. Big things are happening in our world. Prayer is needed. People are searching for light all over the place in all the wrong places as this world seeks to dim the light. All Transfigurations are not viewed as filled with Glory and light, some are thought to be disfigurations. Some are grieving as others are gladdened when the United Methodist got transformed into something different this week. And many who pray for a certain outcome are cheering but some are left wondering, “Where is the truth? Where is the light? Where is God’s inclusive love?”

As you may have been hearing and reading, the United Methodist Church has been going through a challenging situation recently holding a General Conference of U Methodists from all over the world, represented in a gathering praying for light and God’s will in the subject of sexual orientation and the churches acceptance of the gay community. The sessions were held in St. Louis, Missouri last week to decide the way forward for our great church denomination. Half of those voting delegates were pastors and half were lay-persons, 864 in all representing all the rest of us. There are 12.5 million Methodist around the globe with 7 million of us in the U.S.

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The subject was to deal with the church's moral stand of marrying and ordaining those in the LGBTQ community or not, and the goal was to do right and to still keep the church intact either way. It all came down to 2 plans out of several presented. The UMC, as have several other mainline denominations, been divided because of this issue for many years without being united in their theology. The One Church Plan presented would have meant that each church and each pastor would make their individual decisions to perform same sex weddings or not to perform same sex weddings for couples. It would be a choice. In a way that gave a sense of freedom for everyone as each pastor or church to chose whether or not to do this according to their own conscience. It might have meant we could have stayed one church, although the word "United" in our title would be on shaky ground and is right now.

The other choice being considered was the Traditionalist Plan which would keep the wording of the Book of Discipline as is, rejecting married homosexual relationships and it would include additional penalties that would remove from the denomination both pastors and annual conferences who officiate at a same-sex wedding or support the ordination of a married gay pastor. The Traditionalist Plan passed by a small margin of 53% for to 47% against. Not very much. Approximately 25% of the delegates from the

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US and 85% of the delegates from outside of the US voted in favor of the plan, which tells us that the more conservative African and Pilipino nations were a large force in the vote. Have we seen the light? Is it the light for all our brothers and sisters? Some rejoice in thinking so. Some are grieving. Some will choose to not feel welcome and they will leave our denomination. There are people in the United Methodist Church who right now feel left in darkness and they are people who love Jesus whether we might agree with them or not on these important Biblical issues. Whether you are a liberal or a conservative, a progressive or a traditionalist, in these situations any time we act out in hateful ways that hurt other people who live differently than we, we are sinning. Jesus seemed to feel that way also when it came to enforcing the law. He always chose grace as the light to follow and was obedient to the law of love, at the same time, fulfilling the law with an understanding we don't seem able to master

No matter how you feel about the "way forward" that has been chosen, (which for those whom the decision did not go their way), call the it the "way backward," No matter what side you are on, hold onto the light of God's love to everyone who crosses your path, no matter if they do not agree with you on this my prayer is for the light of Jesus Christ to shine in love through each one of us so that we do not lose our Unitedness in Christ

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and we do not lose one another, thus losing the church. I am such an imperfect person myself I find comfort in a sign I saw that quotes Jesus as saying, "You love 'me, I'll judge 'em." Yes, let there be light and compassion in this way forward. It's not over yet!

Jesus and his disciples came down from that mountaintop where no doubt a great discussion had been held over the way forward for him. It wasn't an easy way forward as it led to the cross. But it was a way that would unite us and God through the greatest sacrifice of love and forgiveness ever known to humanity.

Because God forgave us and made a way forward for us to be one with Him, it is up to us to forgive those who do not think as we think. It was John Wesley who said "think and let think" and "If your heart is as my heart, give me your hand" so that we as the church can go forward trusting God is leading the way. I keep reading how those supporters of the One Church Plan are gearing up to find a way to defeat the Traditional Plan in other ways. It will take the light of Jesus Christ to bring this church into unity on a world-wide scale, but we can do our part to build unity in our body of Christ right here in Anthon if we love each other as Jesus loves and accepts us.

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One way we will find our unity today in the communion table as we prepare ourselves to be as one body of Christ, united in the sacrifice of the cross. Let there be light!

And now, Andrea Mitchell as head of the SPRC has an announcement of another change to come in this church, but one which I trust we are faithful enough to handle with grace.

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