December 24th, 2018 – 8pm

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Order of Worship

A Light in the Darkness

I. God came with love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

To begin our reflection tonight, I wanted to share with you a new favourite poem that I learned about this season. It comes from Madeleine L’Engle, who was most commonly known for her novel, *A Wrinkle in Time*. What many may not know, was that she was a devoted Episcopalian and had a deep rooted Christian faith. This poem that I would like to share with you comes from her collection of poems called, ‘The Ordering of Love’ and speaks to this sacred night in which we all gather in waiting:

‘God did not wait till the world was ready,

Till men and nations were at peace

He came when the Heavens were unsteady

And Prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.

He came when the need was deep and great.

He died with sinners in all their grime,

He turned water into wine.

God did not wait till hearts were pure.

In joy, he came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.

To a world like ours, of anguished shame,

God came, and God’s Light would not go out.

He came to a world which did not mesh,

To heal its tangles, shield its scorn.

In the mystery of the Word made Flesh,

The Maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane,

To raise our songs with joyful voice,

For to share our grief, to touch our pain,

He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!’

II. For the Light – Isaiah

My favourite line in the poem is, ‘God came, and God’s light would not go out’, for so often this season, amid the great darkness that looms in the skies and perhaps the darkness within our lives, God claims us as God’s own, and no matter what happens, God’s light and God’s love will always persevere.

The prophet Isaiah, speaks to this as he professes to the community around them, that light will come, pain will be no more, and a Son will be born. Yet, why should his community believe him? The folks he was speaking to were in a position where things could not get much worse: there was betrayal inside and outside the community, Israel and Syria were planning to invade them, and the kingdom of Samaria falls. Things are bleak, to say the least. The community is in darkness, feeling hopelessness, but again, Isaiah claims that the opposite will come to them – joy and light will shine upon them. He shares this powerful message of hope to the people.

I wonder what these good folks were thinking of the prophet Isaiah. We, as post-Christmas people, know that God does come in Jesus Christ, but these people do not. The burden they carry is great – why should they believe this man?

III. Post-Christmas people

Yet, to be honest, even as post-Christmas people, people who have heard the Christmas story on replay throughout the years – I wonder if we might have a dismissive attitude towards Isaiah’s prophecy. Do we really take his words and later, Luke’s words, in their fullness.

I wonder, genuinely, because Christmas has us go through the motions. From the beginning of Advent and lighting of the candles, to the carolling, to the traffic jam of carts in the local shop – what makes Christmas all that special? Sometimes, because it’s an annual celebration – we lose the wonder, the awe, and the joy. And this isn’t a shaming rant – I promise you – because I feel this way too. How, how will the light coming into the world in Jesus Christ feel different than the year before or the year before that? How can, how will, this Christmas change me – how will it change you? Will we mark the day and go on our merry way?

III. Reflecting

If I want this year to be different, if you want this year to be different – we are going to have to turn on a light and look in the mirror. Isaiah says to the people, the yoke of the burden, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of the oppressor will be broken when this new light comes into the world. For me, to let that light in and the Christ child in, for the darkness to dissipate, I’m going to have to get real.

What’s the burden on my back? What is stopping me from living a wholehearted life? Maybe my burden is a fear or anxiety of the unknown, of maybe the bar across my shoulders are relationships that are not yet healed, or perhaps the rod that keeps my joy at bay is a perfectionist curve that prevents me from taking a risk or two. Turn on the light, look in the mirror, what holds you back? What is the yoke of your burden, what lies heavy on your shoulders?

For when we start to answer that, the darkness starts to dull. Another famous writer, Marianne Williamson, was quoted saying, “Darkness is merely the absence of light, and fear is merely the absence of love.” When the darkness of our fear is revealed, light comes in love in Jesus Christ.

IV. May This Year Be Different

This year, I invite you to step boldly into reflection, and fearlessly out of the darkness and into the light. In Luke’s Gospel, the angel came amongst the shepherds, shining great light and that terrified those shepherds. In light, things are exposed, things become transparent, but only in light can love live and grow and dwell. Tonight, is that night – it is an invitation, a plea, to step out of the Christmas routine and step fully into awe and wonder, as if reading the Christ child story was brand new.

Tonight you will light a candle, after we share the meal that our Saviour prepared, and that flickering light will be a poignant reminder that light pierces the dark. Let it pierce our darkness, the darkness of our world, and as you hold that light, as it’s glimmering flame shines brightly in your eyes, remember to hold that feeling. Yes, perhaps your candle will be blown out at the end of the song, but know this, my friends, God, in Jesus Christ, came to bring a light to the world and that light, the light of awe, wonder, and joy that can be found within each of us, cannot and will not go out. **Amen.**