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## TELLING THE TRUTH

One of the things I love about the Bible is that it tells the truth.

- This is why I trust that it is, in turn, true.
- What I mean is that, apart from the many and varied questions of historical accuracy or authoritative interpretation, the biblical story points unfailingly to something that is true.
  - And because it tells me the truth about our life in this world, I trust that its testimony about GOD is also reliable, and true.

And this kind of truth-telling seems particularly important these days, when there is, so often, confusion and debate about the narrative of reality.

- We can actually create our own “information universes” where our biases are uniformly reinforced, our prejudices routinely confirmed, and all opposing views are vigorously and, at times, viciously attacked.

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Take, for example, all that we hear about the coronavirus and the various remedies offered.

- Is there really a pandemic at all, or this some plot of some to undermine our confidence in the government?
- Are vaccines really safe, for how long, or might they even be a strategy by the shadow government to implant tracking devices?
- When the information about guiding principles changes, does it mean that we were previously lied to or that further information and research has led to different understandings than we had previously?

Truth is always a little slipperier than we would like to imagine, and has become downright elusive, or relentlessly challenged in our recent history.

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This is where today’s gospel passage, John’s hymn to the WORD comes in so helpfully.

- Because it starts with a truth that is as undeniable as it is painful.
- There is darkness and difficulty and challenge and loss in the world.
- And John’s first eighteen verses nearly ooze with this difficult truth, especially in four distinct places:
  - v. 5 *The LIGHT shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*
  - John doesn’t hesitate to point out that there is darkness in our world and in our behavior, more so than we would even like to admit.
  - v. 10 *HE was in the world, and though the world was made through HIM, the world did not recognize HIM.*
  - All that is was made through the power of JESUS, yet so many today fail to acknowledge that GOD was and is involved in all of creation.
  - v. 11 *HE came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive HIM.*
  - Though JESUS made all of us, many even fail to admit that connection to our divine formation and relation to the ONE who gave us our very lives.

v. 18 *No one has ever seen GOD...*

- Wait. This truth deserves a full stop.
- All of these statements are clearly true, but this one—our inability to see GOD—can seem at times too painful to bear.
  - The darkness—our darkness—comes because we can't see GOD.

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Phileena Heuertz, in her book, Pilgrimage of a Soul: Contemplative Spirituality for the Active Life, published by InterVarsity Press write:

*Darkness. If you've experienced it, you know what I'm talking about. Darkness sets in long before we're old enough to recognize it. It begins with anguish. We've been hurt, sometimes tragically, and we don't know what to do with that injury.*

*The safest thing seems to be to hide the pain, perhaps behind a mask. We seek to be safe by any means necessary. We learn to cope. And we achieve for ourselves a form of love, security or power that the wounded part of us desperately needs. But these coping mechanisms rob us of fullness of life. To really thrive in life, our soul needs to be transformed—over and over again.*

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John tells us the truth about this pain and emptiness and loneliness and longing that are part of our life in this world.

- And when we hear this truth, and we're often and perhaps surprisingly relieved to hear someone admit it,
  - we discover that, as difficult as the darkness can be,
    - naming it helps define it, even limits it, and often robs it of its power.
  - Even more so, when we dare to tell this difficult truth,
    - it, honestly, makes us seem more trustworthy and more courageous for doing so.

This is the first truth, that we live in a world that has many dark places.

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Listening to this first truth, about our inability to see GOD, in turn, prepares us to hear the second, even greater truth, to which John bears witness:

- that while there is darkness, the LIGHT shines on.
- In fact, the darkness can neither comprehend nor overcome nor vanquish the LIGHT.

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But perhaps we need to be clear about this LIGHT, its identity, and what that means for us.

- In v. 9, John tells us, *"The true Light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world."*

Who is this LIGHT that was coming into our world? Who is it that John is talking about?

- Of course, we know that this is the story of JESUS becoming human, in flesh, so JESUS is the LIGHT of whom John speaks.

- We know Luke's Christmas story and Matthew's, but did you know that this is John's Christmas story, the third one in the Gospels?

JESUS is the LIGHT who comes into the world to shine in the dark places.

- Those who accept and recognize HIM in this way in turn recognize that they are children of GOD.

v. 12 *Yet to all who did receive HIM, to those who believed in His name, HE gave the right to become children of GOD.*

- And, while it is impossible for us to see GOD, yet JESUS, the ONE who comes from the FATHER and reveals the heart and character of GOD,
  - this JESUS has made GOD knowable and accessible.

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So much is in this passage.

- Yet, at the close of a difficult and challenging year, that was still *anno domini*— “the year of our LORD,” to use the old language—it is helpful to remember both of these truths.

First, the difficult and undeniable one that darkness exists in our world, and that confessing this creates the trustworthiness and encourages us to admit the griefs and losses we carry,

- and then the second, the hopeful and courage- and faith-creating truth,
  - that GOD’S LIGHT is more powerful than darkness,
  - that GOD’S love is more powerful than hate,
  - and that GOD’S life—embodied and “enfleshed” in the CHRIST-CHILD—is more powerful than even the darkness of death.

As we close out this past year—a year so many of us are ready and anxious to put behind us—I want to tell you how grateful I am for your commitment to the truth:

- the hard and, at times, painful truth, and the, at times, hard-to-believe, heart-achingly beautiful truth of the gospel
  - that allows us to walk through the darkness holding high and proclaiming the LIGHT of CHRIST to all the world.

*The WORD became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the ONE and only SON, who came from the FATHER, full of grace and truth.*

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