

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11
Psalm 126
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Sermon December 17th, 2023
Look! The Light is Over There!

The people who have gathered to listen to John the Baptist speak are living in really dark times (**Image One:** Darkness). Many of them feel hopeless, as they live within an oppressive system where they struggle to pay for a roof over their heads. Where they struggle to put food on their tables. Where they struggle to feel valued, respected, capable of being contributing members in their community, because many of them have been kicked out of their communities. Driven out to live in the wilderness.

Many of them are feeling hopeless living in this oppressive system. It is hard for them to see the light shining or even flickering in the midst of their darkness (**Image One**).

Whenever I hear this story, I think back to my seminary days where I used to supply preach on Sunday mornings to make some extra money. I remember this one time where I was driving in a fierce snow storm on my way to supply preach in a community in Northern Saskatchewan. The darkness was so overwhelming that even when I turned on my brights it didn't do much to guide me along this single lane highway (**Image One**). I was deeply worried, scared that I wouldn't make it out of this storm alive. I really struggled to see God's light shining or even flickering in the midst of the darkness of this storm (**Image One**). How many of us Canadians have found ourselves in this scenario at least once?

Or what about the darkness that overcomes us when a loved one dies or is diagnosed with a terminal illness? Or what about the darkness that overcomes us when we are struggling with mental unwellness? Especially over the holiday season. Or what about the darkness that overcomes us when we turn on the news and see the turmoil happening all over the world? Or what about the darkness that overcomes us when something suddenly changes in our community that we didn't want to see changed? It is hard for us to see the light when the darkness overcomes us (**Image One**).

And yet, in the gospel, John the Baptist proclaims to this crowd of weary people that the light is here. The light is shining in the darkness through Jesus, the Messiah, who will soon arrive at the Jordan (**Image Two:** Light shining in darkness).

Sometimes, like this weary crowd. We need someone like John to help us see the light. We need someone to show us where God is working in our lives, and in our world to breathe new life into us.

Like a friend who comforts us when we grieve the death of our loved one, or a psalm that helps us feel God's presence as we grieve. Like a support group or a medication

that helps us cope with our mental unwellness, so we can thrive in this world with everyone else. Like a good news story that we hear from a neighbouring church or non-profit organization that helps us see that God is doing good things in our world through us. Like a bible story that reminds us that though things are changing in our community, that God breathes new life in us through these changes that we go through.

Sometimes we need someone to help us see the light (**Image Two**). Sometimes we need someone to show us where God is working in our lives, and in our world to breathe new life into us.

As I was driving on that single lane highway to a northern Saskatchewan community, afraid that at any moment I could hit some ice and slide into oncoming traffic. Or end up in a ditch. Or hit a deer or moose who was aimlessly wandering around in this storm. As I was white knuckling it to my destination. I saw a light shining in the distance. A light that caught my attention (**Image Two**).

In that moment, peace came over me. Suddenly, I believed that I was going to make it.

As I kept heading north the light kept shining brighter and brighter. Helping me see the road more clearly. Guiding me to my destination.

As I started up a hill, I could finally make out the image that was giving off such intense light in the midst of this storm. It was a giant glowing cross. I was even more convinced that God was present in that car with me looking out for me as I kept driving in the midst of this dark storm. The light was shining bright in the midst of the darkness (**Image Two**). And it was someone's creativity and construction of this cross that helped me, and probably many others, see this light.

As Jesus' disciples, we are called to help people see where God's light is shining in the midst of their darkness (**Image Two**). We are called to walk with people in their suffering, pointing out where God is at work in their lives, breathing new life into them.

Through the Holy Spirit, we are also called to reflect this light in the world through our words and our actions. To be in service for others. To help the vulnerable people in our community get access to what they need. Food, clothing, shelter, mental health resources, a place where they feel safe. To be a reflection of this light to everyone we meet (**Image Two**).

Look! There is the light shining in the midst of the darkness! John the Baptist shares with us. There is the messiah who will liberate us from this darkness. Who will breathe new life into us.

Let us pray, loving God, when the darkness in this world overwhelms us, help us see your light. Empower us to help others see this light. Invite us to reflect this light in everything we say and do.

Amen.

