Homily: January 15, 2023-Second Sunday after Epiphany.

Text: *Isaiah 49:1-7, Psalm 40:1-12, First Corinthians 1:1-9, John 1:29-42.*

For quite some time now I’ve been wrestling with a personal preaching issue. It’s something that’s individual to me but impacts others indirectly-you lovely people who gather here to be church together, and those who tune in on-line twice a month.

Despite the glorious bank of windows all around us here in the nave, it’s dark up here where I preach. There is not physical light overhead to illuminate the preaching space. As my eyes age it becomes harder and harder to read without focused light on the page. That’s something all of us deal with, or will deal with to a greater or lesser degree at some point in our lives based on our genes and all the other factors that contribute to aging. My joints are fine, but eyes are a bit of a visual trainwreck.

Anyhow, I’ve considered what to do about this. I’ve priced pulpit lights and talked to vestry about it; still, when it comes down to it, proper pulpit lights are expensive, and less expensive options are unsightly and inappropriate to this sacred space; and the fact is that right now, we need to direct our financial resources to keeping the doors open and fixing our latest roof leak…which, by the way, is right over there, where our celebration band plays music that is amplified by electricity-you people who sit towards the front on the epistle side may find that the drip/drip into the bucket punctuates your prayers. It’s true that the work of the church never ends, even the mundane but necessary work of keeping our roof repaired.

The upshot is that I’ve just held off resolving this light issue; I forget about it for the most part week to week, and then experience a little adrenaline rush on Sundays when I approach the pulpit with my printed text and try to focus. It is what it is, right? One more thing…

Then, last week, I came across an ad online about a bright, light that I can carry with me wherever I go-one that is hands- free and not too goofy looking… at least *I think* it’s not too goofy looking- you can tell me after church. I’m wearing it now, as you can see. I charge it like a mobile phone; I can adjust where the light goes, and direct it to a page of text I’m holding or text that’s above or below me. I have issues with seeing the altar book when I’m celebrating Eucharist too, so this little light of mine is going to come in handy. Isn’t technology grand!

The light of Christ, which shines on everyone, is like the bright focused light I’m wearing today. It shines in all our dark places. While we may not always be aware of its presence, it illuminates all aspects of our lives. Even though we may not be aware of the light most of the time, when we lose it, we notice pretty quick.

It's not that we lose the light exactly, the light is always present, it’s just that our ability to perceive the light, consciously or unconsciously can be impacted by our circumstances, much like my ability to perceive the light in our nave is impacted by my aging eyes.

For some of us, the cares of the world, physical challenges, stress at school or work, anxiety or outright depression may create a gray filter that gradually overlays our daily experience of living and makes us feel isolated, alone, even hopeless. It’s like we’re walking in deep twilight and don’t know the way home.

If we try to amend this darkness *all on our own*, or distract ourselves from it, (*and we humans are amazingly skilled at creating personal distractions*) we may find some relief, for a time, but inevitably the darkness returns the next time we encounter a stressor we can’t readily resolve in the moment-and there are a lot of those stressors out there, ready to catch us unawares, as we know only too well.

It's then that we need a source of light in our lives that we can access anytime, in whatever state of being we find ourselves. We need that light in moments of crisis, but we need it just as much when our routine responsibilities, or the soul-sucking cares of the world, threaten to rob us of all wonder and gratefulness at the gift of life.

Remember the old Motel 6 tag line: “*We’ll leave the light on for you”*? Jesus, God with us, always leaves the light on for us.

That said, accessing the light is not effortless-it’s not magical; it’s intentional and relational.

John the Baptist built a ministry, very intentionally, to direct people to the light of Christ, which he knew was coming into the world. He himself was not the light, but John knew the way to the light, and that way was through the Messiah, Jesus, God with us.

Because John knew that many people of his time had lost the light due to troubles in their world or in their minds and hearts, John offered them a baptism of repentance, which in essence, asked folks to acknowledge their mistakes and their vulnerability, which in turn enabled people to expand their vision beyond themselves, to see the light when it appeared, a light for all people.

Once the people repented, with John’s help, and understood that they could not go it alone, then they were ready to receive the light, which shone in the world through the grace of God in Jesus.

And so the people followed Jesus when he came, just as Andrew, directed by John, followed Jesus in today’s gospel lesson; Andrew, who not just followed Jesus, but shared the good news of Jesus with his brother Simon, soon to become Simon Peter, when *he* met the Messiah face to face.

In our time, we most often see the light of Christ in each other. That’s the way God planned it when he called us into community to pray, repent, share the bread and wine with one another, and love the world God created.

The Light of Christ is always with us, but we can’t always see it or feel it’s warmth. That’s why we need each other, and why we need the community of faith: To remind us of who we are, *the beloved to God*, to remind us of our dependency on God and one another, *all the time*, and to celebrate together the coming of light into the world in the person of Jesus Christ, a light which manifests in us, today and every day, by faith; when we love one another, as Jesus taught us, and act in love to heal the world.