

## *Looking for Light in the Darkness*

I was recently reminded of a visit our family made to Mammoth Caves a number of years ago. After walking and observing the passageways and geological structures on our way deeper into the cave they turned out all lights - I have never been in total darkness in which I could not see any semblance of the person next to me or even see my hand right in front of my face. For many these days that is a picture that describes their life as they mourn the loss of someone they loved and valued in their lives. Or maybe it is a picture of the battle with depression and despair that has been part of your life and continues even in this season of supposed joy. For some, there is a picture of what has been going on in their lives for these past 10 months with isolation, social distance, minimal touch, very little face-to-face interaction and, fear of a virus and its potential effects as well as countless deaths because of the virus. Maybe it is not completely dark but, it is confusing and even disturbing to have our way of life changed so much and we miss what we used to have.

I'm a morning person, an early morning person. I take a long walk or bike ride each morning or, recently I have taken an occasional early morning kayak trip. I experience the night turning into day, the peaceful water, a blanket of fog, the sunlight breaking through into a new day. Maybe we've found ways to navigate the changes and how to focus on what we have and to communicate with those we love. Or, maybe we have let the isolation take us into time for renewal and prayer and self-care as we cling to God's promises that are new every day and hope of a vaccine and a new normal to come.

Advent is the season in the church year to remember we are waiting but, we have already received The Gift! We have unwrapped it, we have even experienced it, but we're still waiting for one more part that will complete it. Take this time in Advent to celebrate the comings of God into our lives - His coming in a manger, His coming as teacher, prophet, comforter. His coming on the cross, His coming from the empty tomb, and His coming to us each day in the darkness, in times of loss and despair and struggle and confusion and waiting. He comes in promise and hope.

That hope and those promises are there for us throughout scripture:

*"Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper." 1 Kings 19*

*"Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11*

*"In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Ephesians 2*

Little Billy was terribly frightened. He had put his fist into his mother's expensive narrow-necked vase and was unable to pull it out again. Unable to help him his mother calls the neighbors to help with the situation. Eager to help a couple of friends next door hurried over and worked with Billy 20-30 minutes to no avail. Finally, someone asked if he has opened his fist inside the vase so it could be withdrawn easier. "O no!" Billy said, "then I'd lose my marble that I dropped in here."

By the power of God's spirit, we hang on to the hope and promises from God. For some these days of "glad tidings and great joy" are not so great and glad. So, we wait, and we know - the gentle whisper, the rest for our souls, the conquering power, the light in the darkness, the Savior in the manger, on the cross and risen from the empty tomb. In our waiting and transitions we are led to our good and gracious God and his voice and his plans and his mission for our lives and for His church. To God be the glory!

*~ Reverend Dr. Rick Armstrong*

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