

Sermon by Dylan Rexroth – Grace Lutheran Church
2nd Sunday of Christmas - 1/4/25 - John1:1-18

One thing from my elementary school years that I vividly remember is a school field trip to Indian Echo Caverns. The moment I remember most was when we reached the lowest depths of the cave. We were told to close our eyes and cover them so no light could get through. The tour guide flipped a switch and told us to open our eyes. It was as if we never had. Complete and total darkness.

It was thrilling. The other kids and I ooh-ed and ah-ed, stunned by how pitch black it was. We were not scared; we were excited.

Another vivid childhood memory is being at my grandparents' house and going into their basement, alone, usually asked by my grandparents to fetch a board game or VHS tape. Yes, you heard that right, a VHS tape. The light switch was at the bottom of the stairs. Once you flipped it, you were engulfed in darkness, and I was terrified.

I would sprint up the stairs, imagining something chasing me, relieved only once I reached the light above.

Reflecting on these experiences, I learned this lesson: darkness itself is not scary. It's not knowing what is in the darkness that makes us afraid. Being alone in the darkness is terrifying. Being with others, less so.

What we learn from physical darkness helps us understand the kind of darkness Scripture is talking about today.

Continuing from last week with the reflections of Pastor Sechrist, I want to talk about the comparison this gospel makes between God and light. In John's gospel, darkness is not just a place. It is a condition. And light is not just illumination. It is God's presence with us.

This passage introduces John the Baptist and his role. Not as a savior, but as a messenger of God. A witness.

His role is not to be the light in the world, but to testify about that light, so that all may believe.

So, let's pause and talk about what a witness is. A witness sees something, yes. But more importantly, a witness speaks. A witness testifies so that others can understand what has happened and why it matters.

The Bible is full of witnesses. The shepherds come to see Jesus' birth, and they are so overwhelmed that they spread the word about the child. Scripture tells us that all who heard it were amazed. Mary Magdalene and the other women encounter the empty tomb after the resurrection and run to share the news that death has been overcome. The disciples witness Jesus' teachings, his healings, and his life, and they are later commissioned to testify to what they have seen.

We, too, are witnesses. We are called to testify to the love of God. But today's text is careful, and so we must be careful too. We are not called to testify with ego, or to testify about how good Christians we are or how put-together we are. We are not the light.

We are witnesses to the light.

John's Gospel tells us that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, reveals who God is. And because we believe in a living Word, one that speaks to us still and stirs our hearts, we believe in a living God. A God who is active, present, and at work. The miracles of God do not occur because of our strength or our understanding, but because of God's grace and his working through us, which allows us to see the light and bear witness to it.

The scripture tells us that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it. This does not mean darkness is imaginary. It says that light is stronger. It says that even when darkness is real, it does not get the final word.

This is why we testify. We testify when we are lost in the dark, and we testify when we eventually, inevitably, find the light. Testifying does not always mean standing strong. Sometimes testifying means speaking up when you are afraid. It means saying, "I am not okay."

It means asking for help. It means refusing to pretend you can navigate the darkness alone.

I said earlier that darkness itself is not what scares us. Being alone in it does. And the gospel tells us that we are not alone. We know what is in the darkness. What is in the darkness is light. It is God. It is Jesus.

If you feel alone in your personal darkness, hear this clearly: you are not alone. Emmanuel, God with us, is present in the darkness, and often God's light comes through the voices, hands, and presence of others. Seek them out. Speak. Let yourself be witnessed by God and your neighbors. We are not the light, but God works his light through us. God's light can work through you, and God's light can work through others, standing together, hand-in-hand with each other and God.

If you know someone in darkness, stand with them. Love your God and love your neighbor. This is how we testify. This is how we become witnesses of Christ; it is through our love, through our support, through our willingness to stay, and it is through trust in God and one another, that light will never be overcome by darkness.

Amen.