

Benzonia Congregational UCC
January 2, 2011
Second Sunday after Christmas (A)
John 1: 1 - 18
"The Life is the Light of all People"
Dan Furman

Gracious and Loving God,

On this first Sunday of the year, we gather seeking renewal and replenishment. We pray that your Word for us this day open our eyes and hearts to new ways to serve you and new ways to hear you. Heal our brokenness and set us forth on a new journey of warmth and hospitality. We pray that the words that are spoken and the communion of our gathered thoughts, bring peace and glory to you, O God, for we believe that you are steadfast and transforming. Amen.

How much mystery do you allow into your daily routine? Many of us say we don't like surprises. Most of us have routines, almost rituals that we perform each morning: first feed the cats or dogs, or our children, then make breakfast for ourselves, then get ready in a certain order that can be performed almost in our sleep and sometimes is, then it's off to whatever is on our schedule for the day. There might be some mystery, some unknowns on the road, wondering if the other drivers are going to be as efficient as *we always are* or will they set the tone for our mood for the day? There may be some mystery in our workplace or in our homes: will the phone ring, will someone unexpectedly drop by for a visit, but for the most part we have our daytime routines. Then our evening rituals begin in preparation for a new day.

Sometimes, we shake up our own routine to try something new. I bought a new car over the weekend. My previous car served its purpose and then some. I put nearly 200,000 miles on the car in about nine years, but in the last six months it seemed like it was in the shop more than in my garage. In my mind, I knew what car I wanted to purchase to replace the Buick,

but it just was not meant to be. I'm very happy with my selection, but there was an element of mystery in the fact that I was not planning to purchase that brand of car, or even from that specific dealership. How often do we allow mystery into our daily routines?

We have entered into a new year. We may have our routines in place, agendas set, future travel plans made, but we do not know for sure what exactly is in store for us. Is this a good feeling, or is it unsettling? Our grand celebration from last year has officially come to a close. So what now is in store for our church in our 151st year?

Worship, for us, provides a bridge between what we know and what is a mystery. We come here from our routines, from our agendas, from what we know, and we come here for reassurance, for renewal, to reconnect with our friends, but also to reconnect with our God, something that is bigger than us, something that is grander than our problems, someone who is Love, who removes whatever it is that holds us back, and then fills us with new life for a new day.

It is only fair for us to want God to be who **we want** God to be. It is only human for us to want a nice, tight definition of our association with Jesus, who he is for us, how we relate, but as we discover in Scripture, convenience is not how Jesus introduces himself to the world. And so we need to allow for some mystery in our faith. In order for us to recognize that God is still speaking, we must be willing to be open, to pause and to listen for the gentle knocking on the door of our hearts for the invitation and direction God is providing for us as individuals and for us as a people of God.

On this day, this first new day of a new week, of a new month, of a new year, even of a new decade, we hear the good news from the beginning of the Gospel of John. We hear mysterious words, that we cherish. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,

and the Word was God." How mysterious! How other worldly. Our own Jesus as the living embodiment of Scripture, the Word, the teachings, the stories, the prophesies, the miracles, the hopes, the faith... In the beginning was the Word, with God, was God, in him was life, and the life was the light of all the people.

This language is so wonderfully foreign to us. We only hear these words here, in worship, or in our own devotions. The outside world does not focus on these words, or this chapter. The outside world does not have time for mystery. So we as Christians need to make time for mystery, for the Word to invite us back into the realm of wonder, life, and light. We have C.S. Lewis to thank for the fantastic imagery, the gift of Narnia to the world. I am so jealous that the closest I will ever come to Narnia is in my imagination, my TV screen, or in a movie theater. The mysterious wardrobe that was the doorway for four siblings in the Chronicles of Narnia book series, (and now movie series), the mysterious wardrobe was simply a fixture in a home where these children were sent into the country to protect them from the bombs falling on London during the Second World War. When their world literally seemed to be crashing down around them, they discovered a bridge between reality and mystery. It was a marvelous invitation from C.S. Lewis to create a world based on Christian themes, without blatantly overstating the parallels to help a new generation find faith.

We find mystery in novels, in movies, but before too long the novelty begins to wear off when we get to the end of the book or see the credits at the end of the film. But our holy mystery is different, it is always there for us, always inviting us into a deeper relationship. The Word was the life that was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.

We have routines and we certainly have darkness. I could go through the list, but you already know it and your list may contain more items that only you know about that contribute to the darkness: our concerns about the economy, our future, the church's future, the world our children and grandchildren will inherit, our personal doubts or fears, and so many other factors that contribute to the darkness in our lives that overshadows our paths. But in this darkness that we try to ignore or squash with our routines or with full agendas, somewhere in this darkness that surrounds us, is the mystery, is the light. The Word who was with God from the beginning; the Word, who was God from the start and throughout all of history; the Word, is the light, the mystery is the life of all people. The darkness will not overcome the light.

And so if we come here, if we come to church to access the bridge between the worlds we create for ourselves and the mystery that continues to speak to us, to invite us in; if we come here to encounter the holy mystery in the simplicity of a meal at a table where everyone is welcome; if we come here seeking something that is more than us; if we come here seeking healing and wholeness and replenishment, than we must be open, we must trust, and we must begin to live our lives believing that the darkness will not overcome the light!

So how do we do this? The very next sentence from our lesson for us this morning, tells us that there was a man sent from God whose name was John and he was sent to testify to the light. This now becomes our task. This does not mean that we need to become a prophet like John. This certainly does not mean that we need to begin eating locusts with honey like John, but we all have it in us, to allow some mystery to dwell within us, and to testify, to give witness of the light to those whose darkness is overwhelming.

We are accustomed at this time of year to consider new year's resolutions. Some of us may have considered as their new year's resolution, to not have any new year's resolutions!

But as was mentioned last Sunday during the moment for mission, a new year's resolution is a very Christian experiment to attempt. We begin by examining our current life, looking for something we want to change about ourselves, entering into prayer, seeking resolution, and then acting on ways to improve ourselves. The sky is the limit on the number and variety of personal resolutions we may consider. But how strongly have we considered a spiritual new year's resolution? May I invite you to consider entering into discernment about one or all of the following spiritual resolutions for the new year: beginning or ending your day with prayer, attending a Bible study class, volunteering to spend time with our children in Sunday school or our youth. These spiritual resolutions are a good start, but their purpose is for our own benefit or for the benefit of those who are already here. So may I now invite you to resolve this year, to testify to the light, by sharing your love for our church in some manner with at least one person who does not attend church? All you need to do is say, "Someone mentioned at church the other day..." or "The choir sang such a nice anthem..." or "I just love singing Silent Night on Christmas Eve" or "What are you doing next Sunday?" It is our task, to testify to the Light, for we know, we believe that the light will **not** be overcome by the darkness.

I have one more invitation for you this morning. I am creating a Dream Team. If you would like to be a part of the Dream Team, please let me know, or just come. The Dream Team will meet every Monday at noon here in the Sanctuary. This is not a new committee, or a subcommittee; this will not be a one, two, or three year term; there is no need to change the by-laws. The Dream Team will be a way for us to testify to the light. The Dream Team is a place where ideas will be shared for growth in Spirit, growth in numbers in all age groups, growth in mission, in identity, in our continuing pursuit to hear God's still speaking voice. It will be a place to share ideas, hopes, and dreams. You are welcome to come every week, once per month,

or whenever you are able. We will begin with prayer, and silence, and then enter into a time for sharing. If Monday's at noon do not work for you, please tell me, and we will find a way to make it work. If you want to participate via email, please let me know. Due to the office being closed tomorrow, the Dream Team will meet for our first meeting this Tuesday at noon.

We come here seeking a bridge between our routines and holy mystery, but nearly a generation no longer knows how to find this bridge. Some may not know it even exists or where it goes. We are called to testify to the light, recognizing that the Word, the good news, will not be overcome by the darkness, even as we walk together into a new year. Amen.

If you are able, I would invite you to stand. And let us say together what we believe using our Statement of Faith in the front of our hymnals.