

Reflections

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The theme for this Sunday's "Reflections" is in title itself. We are reflections of the Creator's light. We are not the light, just as John the Baptist was not the light. John was the witness to the light of the Anointed One, Jesus. The poem, the scripture reading, the quotations that I am using as my benchmarks for this morning's reflections are given here.

Food for Thought

Gifts On My Altar
Howard Thurman

I place these gifts on my altar this Christmas;
Gifts that are mine, as the years are mine:
The quiet hopes that flood the earnest cargo of my dreams:
The best of all good things for those I love,
A fresh new trust for all whose faith is dim.
The love of life, God's precious gift in reach of all:
Seeing in each day the seeds of the morrow,
Finding in each struggle the strength of renewal,
Seeking in each person the face of my sister and brother.
I place these gifts on my altar this Christmas;
Gifts that are mine, as the years are mine.

Reflection: Notice that what Howard Thurman identifies as gifts are actually the ways in which he chooses to relate to life and humanity.

Scripture Reading: John 1:1-10 (NRSV)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.

Reflection: In these dark times that we entering into we are not the Source of the Light, but we can be witnesses to the light. We can be light-bearers in a dark time.

John 1:1-18 – a paraphrase by Rev. Jim Stamper

Initially there was a pattern for everything. The pattern was God's; God was the pattern. The pattern was always God. Everything came from that pattern. There isn't anything else. The pattern is both the source of life and the meaning of life. It is a way of being alive in opposition to death, and death cannot overcome it.

God sent a man named John to tell people about the possibilities of this way of being alive in opposition to death so everybody would trust the source of life. John wasn't the source of life; he taught how to recognize the pattern. The true pattern, the source and meaning of everybody's life, was coming to people.

Reflection: What is translated as “The Word” in the NRSV translation of the Gospel of John can also be translated in Greek as “Logos,” or the way that things work, the laws of nature. Rev. Jim Stamper uses the word “pattern” to convey his understanding of the word.

I compared it to my experience of watching people walk the labyrinth. I perceive what seems to be random directions in which people are walking, but when I look at the paths of the labyrinth that guide them I can see that they are all actually following a pattern. When all seems dark, there may be light yet waiting to be revealed.

God is in the Manger by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

No powerful person dares to approach the manger, and this even includes King Herod. For this is where thrones shake, the mighty fall, the prominent perish, because God is with the lowly. Here the rich come to nothing, because God is with the poor and hungry, but the rich and satisfied are sent away empty.

Who among us will celebrate Christmas correctly? Whoever finally lays down all power, all honor, all reputation, all vanity, all arrogance, all individualism beside the manger; whoever remains lowly and lets God alone be high; whoever looks at the child in the manger and sees the glory of God precisely in his lowliness. ...

And that is the wonder of all wonders, that God loves the lowly ... God is not ashamed of the lowliness of human beings. God marches right in. God chooses people as instruments and performs wonders where one would least expect them.

Reflection: These times call us to remember the resistance to the religious right exemplified in people like Rev. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It also shows us where we are needed as instruments; with the poor, the refugee, the women and children, the Muslim, the immigrant, and our mother earth.

After the sermon we sang this wonderful winter solstice song – “Light is Returning” by Charlie Murphy.

Light is returning, even though this is the darkest hour:
No one can hold, back the dawn.

Let's keep it burning, let's keep the light of hope alive:
Make safe our journey, through the storm.

One planet is turning, circles on her path around the sun:
Earth Mother is calling, her children home.