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***“Cracks Let In the Light”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
Season of Epiphany, Sunday, January 9, 2022  
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Psalm 72:1-4; Isaiah 60:1-5;  
Ephesians 3:1-13; Matthew 5:14-16

**Psalm 72: 1-4** (adapted from NRSV and The Message)

Give to the Messiah thy justice, O God,  
and thy righteousness to the royal son!  
May the Christ judge your people rightly,  
be honorable to your meek and lowly.  
**Let the mountains give exuberant witness;  
shape the hills with the contours of right living.**  
Please stand up for the poor,  
help the children of those in need,  
come down hard on the cruel tyrants.  
**Outlast the sun, outlive the moon—  
age after age after age.**  
Be rainfall on cut grass,  
earth-refreshing rain showers.  
Let righteousness burst into blossom  
and peace abound until the moon fades to nothing.  
**May the Light of Christ be seen from sea to sea,  
from the River to the Rim. Amen!**

**Isaiah 60: 1-5**

Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.  
For darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the Lord will arise upon you,  
and God’s glory will appear over you.  
Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.  
Lift up your eyes and look around;  
they all gather together, they come to you;  
your sons shall come from far away,  
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses’ arms.  
Then you shall see and be radiant;  
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,

because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,  
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

### **Ephesians 3:1-13**

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—<sup>2</sup> for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you,<sup>3</sup> and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words,<sup>4</sup> a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ.<sup>5</sup> In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:<sup>6</sup> that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

<sup>7</sup> Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power.<sup>8</sup> Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ,<sup>9</sup> and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things;<sup>10</sup> so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.<sup>11</sup> This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,<sup>12</sup> in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.<sup>13</sup> I pray therefore that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory.

### **Matthew 5:14-16**

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

### ***Cracks Let In the Light***

On this beautiful day the Word of God brings into the light the Purposes and Purposes of Light.

We experience light in two main ways: Physically and Metaphysically

First the physical:

“Physical light is the electromagnetic radiation  
that can be detected by the human eye.

Electromagnetic radiation occurs over an extremely wide range of wavelengths,  
from gamma rays with wavelengths less than about  $1 \times 10^{-11}$  meter  
to radio waves measured in meters.”

“No single answer to the question “What is light?”  
satisfies the many contexts in which light is experienced, explored, and exploited.

The physicist is interested in the physical properties of light,  
the artist in an aesthetic appreciation of the visual world.  
Through the sense of sight,  
light is a primary tool for perceiving the world  
and communicating within it.  
Light from the Sun warms the Earth,  
drives global weather patterns,  
and initiates the life-sustaining process of photosynthesis.  
On the grandest scale,  
light's interactions with matter  
have helped shape the structure of the universe.  
Indeed, light provides a window on the universe,  
from cosmological to atomic scales.” –Britannica Encyclopedia

Physical light brings to our senses  
and the world around us  
what we see, experience, connect with.

Physical light is our primary tool for perceiving, communicating, and even believing.  
As they say, seeing is believing.

Someone once asked Mark Twain if he believed in infant baptism.  
Mark Twain responded, “*Believe in it? Hell, I've seen it!*”

### ***Cracks Let In the Light***

Which brings us from the physical properties of light  
to the metaphysical purpose of light.

The Metaphysical Purpose of Light  
is to (1) Expose,  
(2) Reprove,  
(3) Transform

(1) Expose, Admire, Sustain

When you step into a dark room,  
your arm reaches out to the wall to find the light switch and flick it on,  
bringing light to what once was hidden.

In a blessed way,  
the Light of the Messiah brings to light  
that which we are meant to see, experience, cherish.  
God's Light enables us to Admire the beauty of God's creation and God's people.

We trust in the Light of God to sustain you, guide you, beckon you forward  
when all around you is fog.  
You know, during a tough period in my life  
I went through a period of depression that felt like every day was foggy.  
One afternoon,  
thanks to the Light of the Messiah  
witnessed through my family, congregation and therapist,  
I looked up and, seeing a bright light in the sky,  
wondered what it was:  
there was the Light of God  
seeping into the cracks of my being,  
exposing and bringing outward my joy and hope.  
Later, when I read Traveling Mercies by Anne Lamott,  
I jumped up when she said,  
*"There is cracks, cracks, in everything,  
that's how the light gets in.  
I had cracks but not the hope."*

God's light crept in and exposed and brought to the forefront God's gift of hope.

## (2) Reprove, Admonish

The Light of God's goodness and grace shines on that which is harmful or hurtful,  
that which divides or destroys,  
and calls everything and everyone to accountability.  
Divine Light admonishes and reproves  
all that seeks to stay in darkness  
and hide in the shadows,  
away from accountability and authentic, holy living.

## (3) Transform, Change, Make Over

The Light of the Messiah is cosmic,  
able to transform and change human lives  
and human communities  
and the human context.  
We who are not perfect, who are flawed and frail and fragile,  
are to be channels of a Light that is cosmic, transformative, world-changing.

Could this be what Leonard Cohen meant in his song entitled "Anthem"?

*Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in*

*You can add up the parts  
But you won't have the sum  
You can strike up the march,  
There is no drum  
Every heart, every heart  
To love will come  
But like a refugee.*

The Light pours in through the cracks and crevices  
and works its way into our souls and relationships and livelihoods.  
The Light of the Messiah is given to you and you and you,  
given unconditionally, generously, abundantly  
given not to be hidden or hoarded but to rise, shine and transform.

We know this to be true because, hey, we've seen it!  
And we've heard it as well, for this truth is the song of our souls.

### ***Cracks Let In the Light***

Psalmist and Isaiah anticipate, look for, cherish the Light of the Messiah to Come

Witness for yourself how our spiritual forbearers  
recognized the power and promise of God's loving light  
to expose, reprove, and transform:

We hear again from the Psalmist,  
who sang a song of deliverance and hope for the Light of the Messiah to come.

*Give to the Messiah thy justice, O God,  
and thy righteousness to the royal son!*

*May the Christ judge your people rightly,  
be honorable to your meek and lowly.*

*Please stand up for the poor,  
help the children of those in need,  
come down hard on the cruel tyrants.*

*Be rainfall on cut grass,  
earth-refreshing rain showers.*

*Let righteousness burst into blossom  
and peace abound until the moon fades to nothing.  
May the Light of Christ be seen from sea to sea,  
from the River to the Rim. --Psalm 72: 1-7*

A few generations later,  
the prophet Isaiah gave voice again to this song:

*Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*

*For darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the Lord will arise upon you,  
and God's glory will appear over you.  
Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn. –Isaiah 60: 1-3*

Jesus the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God,  
gave testimony to the Light, proclaiming, *"I am the Light of the World!"*  
and then gave it away,  
empowering us to be bearers of the Light that shone through Him:

*"You are the light of the world.  
A city built on a hill cannot be hid.  
No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket,  
but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.  
In the same way, let your light shine before others,  
so that they may see your good works  
and give glory to your Creator in heaven." --Matthew 5:14-16*

They say a couple lived on a lonely hilltop in Scotland.  
Everyday at dusk they lit a lamp and set it on a tall post,  
its yellow glow casting electromagnetic waves against the darkness.  
They did so night after night, year after year,  
never knowing whether it made a difference,  
but light it each night they did.  
One day in the valley below  
they mentioned to the shopkeeper where they lived.  
*"Be ye the light upon the hill?"* asked the shopkeeper.  
*Thank ye, for it brings much hope  
to we who live in the valley,  
to look up every night and see the light."*

### ***Cracks Let In the Light***

The Church is called to release the Light of the Messiah,  
to be bearers of the Light,  
to do so with equanimity and grace.

At the core of the Light of God  
is mercy and justice,  
care for the needs of God's people,  
and compassionate responses to overcome oppression  
and deliver the oppressed and disinherited.

Paul in Ephesians testifies to the Church and the wider Community

that when the Messiah came,  
He showed us the Light of God's Grace and Goodness,  
which is to be shared with equanimity with neighbors,  
be they Hebrews or Gentiles, believers or not,  
local or from other lands and cultures.

Paul said,

*"This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus  
for the sake of you Gentiles—  
for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace  
that was given me for you,  
and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation,  
as I wrote above in a few words,  
a reading of which will enable you  
to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ.  
In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind,  
as it has now been revealed  
to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:  
that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs,  
members of the same body,  
and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."*  
--Ephesians 3: 1-6

To Paul, the Light of the Messiah revealed  
our mission, our purpose, our vocation, saying:

*"For at one time you were darkness,  
but now you are light in the Lord.  
Walk as children of light."* --Ephesians 5: 8

We, the Church of Jesus Christ, are called  
to embody the Light of the Messiah in our community.

We are to be the Hope that our world so longs for.

We are to re-present a living hope  
that the Light is real, is here, is to come, is to last and be everlasting.

The Bible inspires and informs us that:

*"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shined."* --Isaiah 9: 2

*"The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness did not overcome it."* -- John 1: 5

## *Cracks Let In the Light*

Let us be clear about the language we choose to use.  
Light is not white.  
Dark is not black.

Biblical language that speaks of the Light of God  
and the Darkness to be Overcome  
has nothing to do with skin pigmentation or social status.

Such prejudicial affiliation of light and dark with skin pigmentation  
did indeed come about and seep into our everyday vernacular,  
but not until several millennia after  
biblical psalmists, poets, priests and prophets  
lived and proclaimed the Good News of the Messiah to come.

Sadly, truthfully,  
starting in the Medieval Age,  
prejudice based on skin color, religion and culture  
was formerly cast as a way of seeing and believing and behaving,  
so much so that racial prejudice based on skin pigmentation  
was determined to be the way of the world.

Here we are, over a thousand years later,  
still attempting to overcome the harm of racism,  
still seeking to bring divine light  
into the cracks of racism and discrimination,  
still seeking to overcome and set aside the sin of judging people  
based “on the color of their skin  
rather than the content of their character.” (MLK Jr)

The Bible teaches us a way to go into each day, each new, shining day  
seeing the world and one another – and even ourselves --  
through a metaphysical lens of goodness and grace.

We celebrate that when the Psalmist and Isaiah,  
the Gospels of Jesus Christ and later the Pauline letters  
speak of light and dark,  
theirs is a metaphysical declaration  
of the presence of the Goodness and its absence,  
of a prophetic vision of Divine Deliverance  
and a dire warning of Unfettered Evil.

Arise! Shine!

Let your light so shine into cracks that so desperately crave, need God’s love.  
Together we can be the Light that exposes, reproves, transforms!  
Believe it? Hey, we’ve seen it!



## ***Cracks Let In the Light***

Once upon a time, back before Covid,  
way back when we were delighted to offer Children's Church  
and lessons from the Godly Play curriculum,  
we started and concluded each lesson  
with a candle and candle lighter.

A fellow teacher of Godly Play explains:

[Rebecca Ramsey, Minister to Children at First Baptist Church, Greenville, South Carolina]

*"When our children enter our classroom on Sunday morning  
and join the circle for the story,  
they see that the candle is lit.  
We remind them that the candlelight helps us remember  
that this is a special time,  
and that God is with us  
as we spend an hour thinking about the Light of the World."*

*"The candle remains lit  
throughout our time in class  
until our very last moment of closing.*

*"...we have a tradition for 'changing the light.'  
Each Sunday at the end of our time together,  
one child gets his/her/their turn to change the light.  
As they extinguish the candle with a snuffer,  
we watch the smoke twirl around and spread  
until we can't see it anymore.*

*We remind the children that just because we cannot see God,  
God goes with us as we leave,  
much like the smoke that fills the room,  
[the smoky fragrance] that gets in our hair and on our clothes,  
that we can sometimes catch a whiff of,  
if we're paying attention.*

*We take the Light with us as we leave,  
and we hope to carry it to others as we go through our daily lives."*

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!