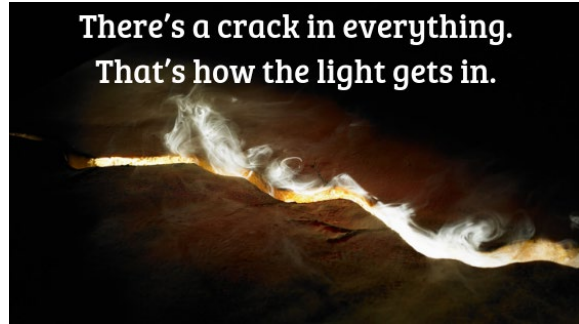


Light That Never Goes Out

John 1: 1-5

First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

3rd Advent, Dec. 10, AD 2023
Gerrit Scott Dawson

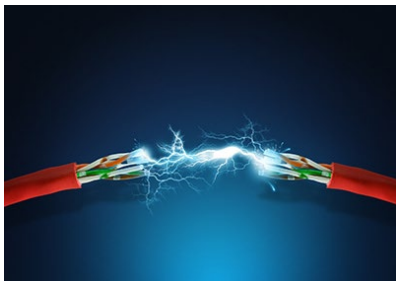


There's a crack in everything.
That's how the light gets in.

In his song “Anthem,” the gravel-voiced, edgy singer Leonard Cohen wrote a profound line: “There’s a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets through.” Cohen speaks what we all know. The world is broken. People are *cracked*. They crack up against the overwhelming barriers of life. They’re cracked in the head

with crazy ideas. Our institutions don’t work right. There are cracks in the infrastructure, the supply chain, the delivery. The streets are full of potholes and hearts are slashed open with betrayals and rejections. There’s a crack in everything. True that. But Cohen also speaks our hope. It’s through the cracks that the light gets through. Cracks break the shell. They open us to the realization that we can’t make it on our own. We can’t figure it out life alone. We can’t solve the world or our mortality. But just as our control and pride cracks, openings for the light appear. God, like morning sun, peaks through the gap in the curtains. He shines in the crack where the door meets the threshold. Light steals in.

Andrew Peterson put it another way in a song we love to sing at church. “Is He Worthy?” forms a call and response. A question is asked, “Do you feel the world is broken?” The reply is made, “We do!” Another question, “Do you feel the shadows deepen? (We do!)” There’s a crack in everything. But then he turns the questions, “Do you know that all the dark won’t stop the light from getting through? (We do).” Yes, I know there’s light that comes through cracks. And I long for that healing light to shine. So he names that longing, “Do you wish that you could see it all made new? And our heartfelt, urgent reply, “We do!”



That’s part of what’s going on in our passage this morning. There’s a light that shines in the depth of our personal darkness. The same light that shines amidst the world’s darkness. It is not a natural light. Light in our cosmos depends on fuel. Our Advent candles will have to be replaced next year. Eventually, every created light, even the sun, will burn out. But the light that we

celebrate at Christmas does not come from our cosmos. It comes from another realm. It is the uncreated light of God. Its source is inexhaustible. This Light jumped realms. It teleported through dimensions. From the spiritual realm to our earthly realm. Like electrical current jumping wires, the uncreated light of God arced into our earth. That was the incarnation of the Son of God. And the darkness cannot extinguish his flame. This changes everything.

John writes, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” That seems so contradictory to what we experience. It looks like the darkness of the world is always snuffing out the light. We surge without restraint into taking what we want of life. Christians are persecuted around the world like never before. Violence and aggression trample all in their way. Children go hungry. Cities burn. The darkness like a great devouring beast seems to be swallowing up the light. How can the light ever get through?

It comes *through the cracks*. In the least expected ways. Flashes of light that tell us what the final victory will be like. I was talking recently with Scott McLain, the director of Young Life in Baton Rouge. We bemoaned our secular our culture has become. We grumbled about government overreach. But then Scott said, “You know what? None of that stops me from discipling kids. Nothing prevents me from meeting hurting, lost students where they are.” We still have freedom to care for people.

This is particularly true when Christians are willing to care for the overlooked, the discarded and the non-influential. For instance, many Islamic countries appear to be particularly difficult for sharing the gospel. Overt evangelism meets strong opposition. But a program that cares for special needs youth finds a great welcome. A foundation board I’m on approved a huge grant for Young Life’s Capernaum ministry in the middle east. Capernaum focusses on special needs children and their families. Capernaum carries the gospel to people in Baton Rouge and, remarkably, to countries otherwise resistance to the gospel.

On the same call, we approved a grant for Young Life’s work with teenage mothers called Young Lives. It also works around the globe. In Baton Rouge and it works in Dundee, Scotland, a very secular town with a ridiculously high number of teen pregnancies. People otherwise resistant to Christian ministry gladly welcome those who will open a future for these moms and their children. Christ’s light turns crisis into a new life of hope and responsibility and support.

About ten days ago, Whitney and I met with George Gillam, Daryl Waters and Ron Hicks. Each of them spent more than 25 years in the Angola prison. Each of them came to faith in Jesus Christ. Each became a pastor in Angola, and nurtured hundreds of men to faith. Their testimonies speak of rage turning into love, of sin being atoned for, of despair turning to hope. They are each on fire to share the gospel in North Baton Rouge. They radiate the light of Jesus whom they feel living, moving, daily in their hearts.

One more. We're blessed to have a number of therapists and some powerful healing prayer groups in our congregation. Without receiving any personal information, I hear the outline of stories of people being healed from the deep scars of trauma. From emotional crushing to physical violation to decades of feeling discardable and worthless, people are discovering the love of Christ. They experience Jesus seeing them, tending them, forgiving and welcoming them. It's slow, messy, up and down work. But over time, people change. All the cracks become the openings for the light to get through. The light still shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.

These are just some examples from a couple of weeks of observing ministry through our church. But there are thousands of ways God shines his healing, sustaining, energizing light through our cracks. The darkness cannot overcome the light of Christ and his love. Jesus is the light from above. Light that has arced from heaven to earth. The light in the face of the babe in Bethlehem.

We hear this need and this hope in so many Christmas carols. Think of the lines from "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear,"

And you, beneath life's crushing load, whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow,
Look now for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing,
And rest beside the weary road to hear the angels sing."

Or from "O Holy Night,"

Long lay the world in sin and error pining.
Til he appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices.
For yonder breaks a new and blessed morn."

In Christ Jesus is life, and that life is the light of all. Be of good cheer, dear ones. His light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. So we join our hearts as our choir sings the ancient words, "Break forth, O beauteous, heavenly Light, to herald our salvation!"

