

Living into His Name, Pt. 2
Dawn, David and Desire
Luke 1: 67-79

**First Presbyterian Church
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Eugene Peterson's last book is called, *Every Step an Arrival*. He got his title from a poem about dogs. For a dog on a walk, every new step is an adventure. Even if they've been on the same route a thousand times, to dogs, each excursion seems brand new: fresh smells, intriguing sounds and deliciously distracting sights. Dogs move forward enthusiastically. Hopefully. Every step is arriving some place new.

Therein lies an entire outlook on life. Do I greet each new moment as laden down with tedium? Or do I welcome every fresh minute as opportunity to experience something wondrous?

We are creatures of time. We live only in the present moment. We can't go back to the past in any way except memory. We cannot skip ahead to the future. We have to wait for it. We live only now. But we creatures of time are also creatures of hope. We expect the next moment. We look for it. We feel the future coming, coming towards us. We wonder, "Will the next day bring just more of the same? Will it bring worse misery? Or will it bring something fresh? Will it bring opportunity to experience more of God, even if it's hard sometimes?" Faith views every step as an arrival. Knowing Jesus can change the way we look at each new moment crashing into the present from the future.

Today's Scripture lesson is known as the Song of Zechariah. He was an old man when his wife Elizabeth conceived the child who would be known as John the Baptist, the older cousin of our Lord Jesus. After his son John was born, Zechariah was filled with joy and filled with the Holy Spirit. Perhaps holding his infant in his arms, Zechariah spoke forth a beautiful prophecy about the arrival of God in our midst. He rejoiced that his baby son John would be the herald and forerunner for Jesus the Messiah. You can feel the overflowing father's pride and love in his words,

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
For you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
To give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,

Because of the tender mercy of our God,
Whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
To give light to those who sit in the darkness
And in the shadow of death,
To guide our feet into the way of peace.

Zechariah foresaw a great future for his son John. For John would be the advance man for the coming of God himself to his people. John would be the piper at the gate of dawn. The guy who got to play reveille at sunrise, heralding the dawn of Christ in our midst.

I hope you heard that beautiful phrase about God's future for his people: "Because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high." For those whose present lives are darkness, a sunrise is coming. We all live in the shadow of death. But some days the shadow blankets us more thickly. Once again our community is crushed by the death of a young teenager. Too soon. Too tragic. We want to just sit down in the darkness and quit. But the news reaches us no matter how deep the midnight, dawn is coming. There is news of a sunrise that banishes even death with the morning of everlasting life.

One old translation says that "The dayspring from on high shall visit us." Dayspring. The source of light. Dayspring. The place from which light springs up out of the darkness. The power that the darkness of death cannot overcome. Jesus is the dawn of a new creation. The world's best hope. Jesus is the sunrise and the dayspring. He is the light coming to dispel the dark.

When we talk about sunrise, everyone knows what we mean. Scientists use the term sunrise. Even though we know the sun doesn't really rise. It's the earth that's turning that makes it *seem* like the sun is rising. We experience dawn once a day. But in fact, sunrise is happening somewhere all the time. Every moment it's sunrise somewhere in the world. I've got an app on my phone called World Clock. It shows me the cone of the sun's light moving across the globe as the world turns. You can watch sunrise happening somewhere all the time.

As people who can only be in one place at a time, we have to wait for each day's dawn to end the night wherever we are. As people who know that the world is turning so the light is moving, we know that sunrise is always happening. We can only experience Christ Jesus coming to us one moment at a time. And we don't always experience him with the same intensity. But we know that, just like the sunrise, Jesus is always coming to us by his Spirit. He is always on the way. He is

always meeting us with the sunrise of his love. Every step is an arrival. An expectation for us, even when life is hard. Every moment contains a dawn, because Jesus gives us the grace we need for the demands of each moment. He shines the hope of his victory over sin and death as the promise of our future. His joy, the joy of his certain future for us and the world rushes to meet us in every present moment. The trick is to greet each moment a bit more like a dog: anticipating that I can smell out the fresh, glorious presence of Christ every step.

Dawn is a name for Jesus and the light he shines into us. Another name we read about this past week is also in Zechariah's song. It has to do with David. Zechariah praised God who has "visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David." What's the link between David and Jesus? We remember David as the boy who slew the giant Goliath with a well placed rock from his sling shot. We also remember David as the shepherd who became King of Israel. He wrote some of the most famous words in the Bible, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." What most distinguished David, though, was the fact that the LORD I Am had made an everlasting promise to David. God entered an unconditional, eternal covenant with David. He said, "I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever...Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me" (2 Sam. 7:12, 17). The promise to David meant that God would never forsake his people. No matter how hard times got, the LORD promised them a future.

This week we read a prophecy from Isaiah that was fulfilled in Jesus. God says, "I will place on his shoulder the key of the house David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut none shall open" (Is. 22:22). Jesus is the Key of David. What does that mean? Keys can be a symbol of authority. The one who has the key has the authority to open the door. It could be the door to a treasure house, a secret passage, or a prison. It could even be the key to a life and a future. The key lets in. The key opens what is closed. The key sets free what is locked up. The key gives access to what is blocked. The key gives understanding. Liberation. Future.

One of my recent heroes is Malcom Guite. He's the chaplain of Girton College at Cambridge University. He looks like a wild man. He plays in a rock band. And he's also a tender pastor, a fine poet, and a reliable companion for me in questing for Christ. Commenting on Jesus as the Key of David, Guite recalls being a child going with his mother to see a key being cut. "Not a little Yale key, but a big, old-fashioned, complex one. I remember the locksmith clamping the blank in the vice...and then the noise and violence of what followed, the high-pitched scream and whine of a metal cutter...Suddenly I came to see [Christ's] Passion, the

hammering blows he received, the searching wounds, as somehow the cutting that makes Christ a key that finally fits, unlocks, opens and heals our woundedness.”¹

Jesus is the Key of David. He unlocks all the prophecies of a coming Redeemer. He makes sense of the ancient longings. All the pieces come together in him. And he is the key to our lives. The one who unlocks us. Frees us from sin. Lifts us from despair. Liberates our potential for life. He re-keys our brokenness to be a channel of love. He turns our badges of shame into trophies of grace. His story alone makes sense out of the chaos of the world’s story. He turns the lock of cynicism about the future. He opens the door to the surprising, dramatic victory of God whose future for us makes the world new again.

So we’ve had Dawn and then David. Finally, we take up Desire. Jesus is the Desire of Nations. This name comes from an older translation of Haggai 2:7. It’s preserved in the King James with the LORD speaking, “And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory.” Jesus is what we have been looking for all along. He is what the nations have been seeking all along, looking too often in wrong and weary places. He is what we most truly want.

Isaiah cried out,

Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food. (Is. 55: 1-2).

God knows we are thirsty. He knows we are hungry. What we crave cannot be bought. What we seek cannot be earned, manipulated or commandeered. What we desire, in our deepest longings, cannot be found in any human lover or even in a stable of lovers. What we want most cannot be found in art or literature or music in itself, not even in three weekends of Jazz Fest. It can only be found in one person.

Jesus echoed the words of Isaiah when he called out, “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28). And in Revelation we hear Jesus say, “And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price” (Rev. 22: 17). God made us with desires. He made us needing to seek fulfillment. He made us for relationship with himself.

Jesus has the water of life for which we thirst. The condition for receiving it is *desire*. That same word also means “will.” The condition is wanting, choosing, asking in such a way that we leave off trying to satisfy our thirst our way and seek quenching of thirst in Christ first.

In his masterwork, *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis wrote about the choices we make along the journey toward heaven or hell. This passage has for several decades been very important to me:

You cannot take all luggage with you on all journeys; on one journey even your right hand and your right eye may be among the things you have to leave behind.... It is still ‘either-or’. If we insist on keeping Hell (or even earth) we shall not see Heaven; if we accept Heaven, we shall not be able to retain even the smallest and most intimate souvenirs of Hell. I believe, to be sure, that any man who reaches Heaven will find that what he abandoned (even in plucking out his right eye) has not been lost: that the kernel of what he was really seeking even in his most depraved wishes will be there, beyond expectation, waiting for him in ‘the High Countries’...”

The kernel of what he was really seeking, even in his most depraved wishes, will be there, beyond expectation in the High Countries. Our desires can get skewed. We can grow to crave destructive things. We can develop an appetite for the twisted and tortured, for the consuming of others, for the discarding of precious ones and the ruin of our health, finances and souls. But even in our worst moments, we are looking for life. Yes, too often we seek life in deadly places. But what we want, even at our worst, is life that quenches our thirst. The Person who satisfies our Desire—day by day and hour by hour.

It’s not the fact of our desiring that needs to be fixed. Desire is life. It’s getting our desires oriented toward the right one, toward the only one. Bach’s beautiful tune has such a wonderful title, “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring.” Jesus is that one we crave. You sit surrounded by people who have tasted many things and slaked many desires but now say only one truly satisfies. Jesus is who the Dawn and Dayspring of all our Hope. Jesus who is the Key who unlocks everything.

Jesus who is our deepest desire, who fills us with himself when we come to him, moment by moment, worship by worship, and season by season. We come to him and admit we are thirsty. We offer no money, no performance, no power, no privilege. We offer our thirst and ask him to fill us. This is the heart of a relationship of ongoing thirst and filling, thirst and then God's filling us with the delights of his presence. Into eternity. Come all who thirst. Let the one who desires, take the water of life without price, from Jesus, our Dawn and Desire.

¹ Malcom Guite, *Waiting on the Word* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2015), p. 78.