



One Year Into A Pandemic
Pastor Paisley Le Roy
Bethlehem Lutheran Church
March 14, 2021

Today's passage is familiar and yet foreign. It has something to say for today's context. One year into a pandemic and one year into virtual worship. One year from all of those things we named at the start of our worship. One year since our sense of normalcy ended. One year without hugging our families - our grandparents, our grandchildren. One year since children were born that have never been held by anyone besides their parents. One year of taking it day by day. One year.

We, too, like the Israelites who wander alongside Moses, have been in the wilderness so long. We may, like the Israelites, join in questioning: have we been brought here to die? We too, like the Israelites, dream about returning to the familiar world rather than staying in this time of exile, of wandering through deserts, wondering if we'll ever arrive.

And, yet... we, too, have a God who is a relentless Lover. The God of Israel and the God of us will time and time again show up and provide a way where there seemed to be no way.

But, unfortunately, the God of Israel and the God of us doesn't promise that is going to go easy. It will be costly, in fact.

Our Scripture starts today, "And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up."

Maybe you, like me need a refresher on this serpent business...so, a reading from Numbers:

The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” **6** Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. **7** The people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. **8** And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.” **9** So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

...Commentator Debi Thomas wrote this week about the power of looking up at the serpent...How the Israelites that day were forced to look up at that which has harmed, poisoned, broken, and killed them

...and, in the midst of that grief, that anger, that judgment...catch a glimpse “the unending mercy of a God whose love is vast but tough, deep but demanding. It’s a love that will heal but also expose truth - truth that hurts. It’s a love that will deliver but at the same time invite a change in perspective, a shift in apprehension, a bitter but ultimately salvific ‘looking up.’” (Debi Thomas)

Just as the serpent lifted up was given out of love that day, so too Jesus was given out of love for us. A love that confronts, though. A love that exposes or drops a “truth bomb” as Pastor Sarah spoke of last week.

After all, that is what “light” in this passage is to be, right? That which exposes. That which illumines our context and gives us new eyes.

So what does the Light illumine for us *this* day or, rather, if we’re reflecting today on one year of COVID... what does the Light illumine for us *this* year ?

One of the biggest things, I think, is our interconnectedness.

We have learned that we are connected in ways that have been proved deadly at times. Connected in ways that allowed this virus to flourish in the first place. And our connectedness has illuminated for us, perhaps for the first time, the direct impact my actions have on my neighbor and vice versa.

But also this time has exposed to us the beautiful, life-giving depth of our connection - the roots in which human communities have established from the rich, foamy soil of God's endless love.

It's a tenacious connection, inspiring us to learn and adapt in order to keep celebrating the milestones in people's lives.

It's showing up at Saint Andrew, blessing those who are struggling with food to eat. It's gathering easter baskets for those in foster care. It's volunteering as a CASA.

It's writing cards and calling one another. It's reaching out to those experiencing isolation in new, powerful ways. It's sending your financial resources if you are one of those blessed by not struggling during this time. It's delivering Sunday School bags and praying for one another. It's offering your musical talents for virtual worship. It's delivering tablets so those without internet access can be in worship life.

Our interconnectedness has come out in many and various ways throughout this and, y'all. It has been beautiful, even when it's been confronting.

Because it's a connection established through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus into which we are baptized and, in whose water we are made one people.

It is in all of these acts of carving resilient connection, that we have become people of light. People shining Christ's light of love in and through our words and deeds. Living our baptismal calling, "to let our light so shine before others."

But, especially in this wilderness time, when we are apart and things look unfamiliar, it can be easy to feel as though these deeds go unnoticed. And so we turn now to an intentional time of giving thanks for all those who have helped us this year continue to illuminate our hearts with the light of God's love we find in worshipping together....

(continue with thanksgiving for folks who helped with worship)