

I like to keep a little light on. Even now, even if it is just a sliver of light shining from the closet, or from the barely open door to the bathroom, I like a just a little light. I'm not afraid of the dark anymore, I just would like to limit its boundaries. Darkness is not scary if we have some idea of its limits. I am sure you have been in Cumberland caverns like I have, and during the tour they sit you down and tell the history of the cave's discovery and exploration. Then they turn the lights out. And there is thick, black darkness. Like you could reach out and grab a handful of it if you could see anything in front of your face.

One time I woke up in the middle of the night at my grandmother's house. My eyes were still dry and stinging from an evening of tears and uncertainty. I was eight years old. There was always, even in the daytime a nightlight plugged in in the middle of the hallway that bisected the back of her house. But I couldn't see any of its warm orange glow. I sat up in the bed in that cave like darkness, trying to claw a hole into the blackness, but coming up empty handed. After a few minutes, my eyes began to adjust. I could see down the hall, clear to the other end of the house a tiny glow of cold, almost blue light barely illuminating the features of the kitchen table. Maybe my imagination was just reconstructing what I knew was already there, but I could see it, and use the landmark as a horizon to navigate myself to the kitchen bathed in faint blue light.

I sat down at the table. My grandparents kept a small battery-operated clock and an even smaller battery-operated transistor radio on the table. I had been asleep longer than I thought. The clock read 3:36am. I didn't want to wake anyone up. But I knew I couldn't go back to sleep, not in that kind of darkness. I like to keep a little light on. But the moonlight barely able to penetrate the sheer curtains wasn't portable. I had to stay there. I switched on the radio with the volume so low that only I could hear it. There was a crackly other-worldly voice of some preacher who was probably long since dead coming through the tiny AM radio speaker. I didn't really need to understand what he was saying, just that someone was saying something. Someone wasn't arguing over custody or putting me in the middle. Somehow the volume even at its minimal level began to fade. And the little radio went dark. And I felt like the only person alive in the world. But there was some sense of hope. I like to keep a little light on.

And that is what Advent is about. Fleming Rutledge has a famous saying that, "Advent begins in the dark." We look outside and we can see it. The daylight is getting shorter. The leaves are all falling off the trees. It is cold. The animals are going to sleep. Perhaps like me you have been ill with the sicknesses that seem to attack us this time of year. We feel like things will never be the same, not like it was last year or sometime in the misremembered past. And on some level we are right.

The cyclical nature of our liturgical year reminds us that we have been here before, but the absence of our loved ones, or the diagnosis that has overtaken the story of this year tell us that it is not and cannot be the same as it ever was. Jesus is reminding us of this reality and the difference that he is making and has made in the world. It is not for us to know the time, and what would we do with that information if we had it? What Jesus is describing, is this dual nature of the season of Advent. Things have not been the same since the Mystery of the Incarnation occurred. Since the Word became Flesh and moved into our neighborhood, there have been rippling effects.

We like to keep a little light on. When we are confronted with the darkness of the world or the darkness in our own hearts, it is a little too much. It is frightening. We are all sitting in Cumberland Caverns with the lights off. But the hope that Advent provides is beyond what we will pray for after we receive communion, beyond strength and courage, our collect today says we need more than that to cast off the works of darkness... we need grace and great humility. We don't need to turn all the lights on. We just need to wait in the darkness for a bit and let our eyes adjust. And maybe once our eyes adjust we can see just a faint light, but it will be enough.

There is language in our scriptures this morning about going somewhere. It is hard to go somewhere in the dark. At least in terms of what our culture says is valuable. It is not very efficient to travel one footfall at a time in the darkness. But pilgrimage is not about how fast you can get there.

Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;

I was glad when they said to me, \*  
"Let us go to the house of the Lord."

salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near.

Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

What if salvation comes to us when we least expect it. That is what Jesus said, right? What if on the worst day of your life, when you didn't know who loved you anymore, that you found yourself feeling like the only person alive. Sitting in the darkness having barely enough light not to fall down. Bending over trying to hear another comforting voice but fading. And that is when Jesus came and made your heart better. When there is nothing you did to deserve it or earn it. You were just there in the dark when his light came on. We like to keep a little light on.