

“We Are Marching in the Light of God”



John 1:1-10
Exodus 3:9-10

Almighty God, your Son, fasted for 40 days in the wilderness and was tempted as we are, but remained faithful to you and His mission to redeem us from sin and death. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to overcome our weakness, that we might be strengthened in the faith of our baptism and walk in communion with you. This we ask in Christ's holy name. Amen.

Today is the 1st Sunday of LENT. Lent is not meant to be a season where we punish ourselves as we look forward in guilt toward the crucifixion of Jesus. The word "Lent" actually comes from the old Anglo-Saxon word for "Spring." During Lent, we are to be revitalized, nourished, fulfilled, fertilized, and made whole. We are to grow in strength and hope, and confidence. During Lent, we try to grow our souls in the midst of the wilderness. In many ways, then, Lent is a gift for us. We have the gift of this season to take a breath in the midst of our busyness.

"Lent" comes from the ancient English word *lencten* for "lengthening" - meaning the lengthening of days - and refers to the pattern of new life that emerges during the season of Spring. The Church uses reminders of life all around us as signs and symbols of the New Life won for us by the death and resurrection of Jesus including flowers, new born lambs, baby chicks and Easter eggs alike.

So today's message will focus on three things. First, we will take a look at Jesus' experience in the wilderness. Second, we will look at the voices of the cries of slaves and how they were treated during their wilderness through the song "We Are Marching in the Light of God" since this month is black history month. But finally, we can look at our wildernesses and how God is the light to every wilderness. To be in a wilderness means to be in a position of disfavour where you go through intense experiences. It means to be in a dark place where there is no light. Sometimes the phrase "in the dark" might be used to indicate that we are confused, don't understand, unclear, bamboozled. For example, under the cover of darkness, many crimes are committed. We think of many acts of cruelty and violence as coming from our dark side. Death is described as something dark and sinister.

Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights. During those 40 days of spiritual retreat, Matthew tells us that Jesus fasted, and at the end of that time of fasting, he was famished. There is a beauty and richness in this 40-day season of Lent.

Forty is a precious number in the Christian life. It is a reminder of the forty years the people of Israel wandered in the desert in search of the Promised Land. The forty days and forty nights of the storms and floods told in the story of Noah's Ark remind us of the purification and new life brought about by water. But most of all, it is the forty days that Jesus went into the desert before his public ministry which set the pattern for Lent. There he was tempted as he struggled to understand what he was being called to do, who he was called to be.

Fasting indicates a period of self-denial, in which Jesus came to reflect upon what it meant to live in a covenantal relationship with God. In other words, he trusted God to provide for his basic needs as he contemplated how he might live his life according to his Father's will. Jesus was sustained by the word of God when He was in the wilderness. Jesus' experience in the wilderness was the experience that freed Him from distraction. It helped him focus on His true

purpose. Even if Jesus was in the wilderness, where everything was dark, He was able to make it because there was light during that darkness. The word was with Him.

Lent season is a reminder that Jesus came to free the marginalized by being marginalized Himself. Jesus came to bring freedom to the oppressed by being oppressed Himself. He came to breathe life into those who can't breathe. Jesus came to die and give life to everyone who places their faith in the marginalized God-man from Roman-oppressed Nazareth.

Oppressed, marginalized, broken-hearted, Jesus sees you. Even if no one else understands, Jesus knows. It's for you that He came. With the context of who Jesus is and what He went through, we can see a little more clearly some of the purposes of His death. Christ died for the oppressed by means of being oppressed Himself. He was on the cross to liberate the oppressed by being oppressed Himself. Jesus was falsely accused so that He can be your light when falsely accused. The system failed Him so that He can be your light when the system fails you. Jesus was in the wilderness, clearing the way for all those who will be in the wilderness. Christ was with slaves when they suffered during slavery times.

Lent season is meant to remind us that Jesus knows what it is to be marginalized. Jesus knows what it is to be wrongfully accused. Jesus knows what it is to have the system against you. Jesus saw darkness when He was on that old rugged cross when the entire world turned into darkness. Scripture teaches us this in Mark 15:33. "At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon." For 3 hours, everything was dark when our Saviour was crucified. Jesus knows it all. Jesus understands you when life is dark, and Jesus understood slaves in their dark days. This Lent season is a season that we are all reminded that as dark as it looks, the light is always there for us.

Let me say this to you. "When the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea," but God was there. When black people suffered working long hours, picking cotton and tobacco for white people, God was there. When you go through trials and tribulations in life, God is there. Even amidst the darkness in the world now, God is there. Apart from God, everything is dark. Everything is dark without Christ. The Light will shine and reveal the very nature of the Savior Himself. The Light will shine and reveal the nature of sinners. It will shine and reveal the nature of believers.

For the past two weeks, we have been exploring the stories behind some commonly known Protestant hymns like "We Shall Overcome" and "The Balm in Gilead." We saw how spiritual songs sustained slaves during slavery, and today we will look at the song "We Are Marching in the Light of God" to see how people in South Africa survived in dark times. "We Are marching in the light of God" is a protest song from South Africa. This song was sung by those protesting against apartheid in solidarity with those who are oppressed. Siyahamba, which is subtitled 'We Are Marching in the Light of God,' is the first of the Three Global Songs of John A Behnke (born 1953). This song was rewritten as a Christian hymn by Andries Van Tonder in 1952, and in 1978 it was "discovered" and recorded by the Swedish choral group Fjedur. After that recording, the song was widely popularized throughout the world, mostly through Churches and schools. This song was for finding God in the wilderness and finding light when it was dark.

We are marching in the light of God are Zulu words translated from the word "Siyahamba," which means "we are marching in the light of God." The light of God has meaning on several levels. While light is a symbol of creation and of Jesus Christ, the light of the world, God is light, and in Him, there is no darkness at all. God is the source of clear sight in the midst of struggle. God is the source of discernment and truth. Where there is light, there is hope. God is light, and in Him, there is no darkness at all.

So, John, the disciple, one of the twelve, Jesus' beloved, has a message of Jesus who was once in the wilderness, as the light, and that message of the light will be tied up with the pain and

sorrow from black people, and that message will be declared to you, and that message is: God is light, and in Him, there is no darkness at all. The word Light is mentioned 71 times in the gospel of John. In the Old Testament (OT), the God of the OT was a God of light who appeared to Moses as a burning bush and led the Israelites out of slavery as a pillar of fire. The image of light is a powerful picture of God. Light cannot be contained. Light has no shape or form. You can't hold it in your hand or close it up in a box. In fact, if you look in the dictionary, the first definition for "light" is "something that makes vision possible." This light we just described is the light that led the oppressed to keep going despite their hardships, and this light in the gospels can sustain us during dark days.

In verse 4, the gospel of John refers to Jesus as the Light that guides us. As long as we are in Christ, we can make it. Where there is no light, we do not see. Where there is light, there is hope. God is light, and in Him, there is no darkness at all. This is what Lent season is all about. Christ suffered so that we can be comforted when we suffer. Christ was the light of slaves when they were suffering, and He is our light today when it's dark.

Verse 5: Light is a symbol of purity. God's light illuminates the path. Obstacles and stumbling blocks are revealed in the light. Hidden sin is exposed in the light. Bad things we do in private will always be exposed to light. Things that happened during slavery are now being exposed. The light of Christ joins us together on our journey. God shines. It is in His character to shine. It is who He is to illumine His path for all who are willing to walk into that light. The glory of God shines in Christ more brilliantly than in any other revelation and consequently enlightens every man who sees Him for who He is.

God is light. In Him, there is no darkness at all. God does not create foginess. He does not seek to make a life for you and make one big complete mess. But instead, He desires to be our light, to guide our path, to be the way for us through His word. God is light. He is the true Light, as opposed to shadows and symbols. He is the pre-eminent, all-glorious emanation from God. He is the only light for every man. He enlightens everyone who is enlightened. The only light the world has is Christ. He is the only light that can enlighten anyone and everyone. His light is the only sufficient light.

As the sun is the light that lights the world, so Christ is the Light that lights every man. There is no other light. If you accept the Light, you're saved. And if you reject the Light, you're judged. Christ is the true light, and we are His reflections. He is the Sun, and we are His moons. God sheds His light on the world through those who have received His light through Jesus Christ.

Just like the song that was sung for us, light is not given simply to have but to live by. "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path," the psalmist tells us (Psalm 119:105). God's light is to walk by and to live by. In its fullest sense, God's light is the complete revelation of His Word, the written Word of Scripture and the living Word of Jesus Christ.

Lent is about our self-examination. It's a time to reflect. It's a self-examination about how we treat each other—an examination of how slaves were treated as well. As part of our self-examination of Lent, we should repent for all our wrongdoing. Repentance is all about doing what is right in the eyes of God. It is about the restoration of relationship—with God, with God's people, and with all of creation. So, as each of the forty days of Lent goes by, we should use this opportunity to put our lives in order by repenting from our sins. We are the light of this world. We are called to guide and lead our families, our communities and the whole world. We are called to proclaim God's light in a world engulfed in darkness, just as the Lord came "to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death." Lights are to illuminate, not to be hidden; to be displayed, not to be covered.

Christ is the light who guides us along life's journey when we have more questions than we have answers. He is the light that dispels the darkness of guilt with His forgiveness and the

darkness of fear when we take our last breath. He is the light of life and eternal life. Wherever there is darkness in our family, in our friendships, in our community, Christ has come to shed light on all those areas of our lives to restore peace and harmony and joy. Wherever there is darkness in our nation or in the world at large, Christ has commanded us to let our light shine before men. We are to let the light of Christ shine through us so that the darkness of despair and hopelessness might be dispelled. Darkness has filled the lives of so many, but it is now our job as those who have the light of Christ in our lives to let that light shine into the darkness to give hope, encouragement. **We are all called to be the light for the whole world. A city located on a hill can't be hidden.**

If we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. Light is the active power that dispels darkness. And Jesus Christ is the light of the truth that dispels the darkness of falsehood. Jesus Christ is the light of wisdom that dispels the darkness of ignorance. Jesus Christ is the light of holiness that dispels the darkness of impurity. Jesus Christ is the light of joy that dispels the darkness of sorrow. Jesus is the Light that exposes those dark private corners of our lives that we prefer to keep hidden.

Let's use this Lent season as a time when we look closely at our own lives and take responsibility for the mess we have created in our world and in our relationships. During this Lenten season, we are reminded why there had to be a Good Friday and Easter morning in the first place. It is our sin that caused God to send His only Son into the world, to become a human, and then to suffer and die, even though He Himself was completely innocent and did not sin as we do. Jesus forgives and replaces death with eternal life. The Apostle Paul says, "Everyone was going to be punished because Adam sinned. But because of the good thing that Christ has done, God accepts us and gives us the gift of life" (Rom 5:18). God still loves us even though we don't deserve it, and as we worship together over the coming weeks of this Lenten season and recall with thanks what God has done for us through His Son, may we be strengthened in our faith, renewed in our calling as His disciples and refreshed in the knowledge that we are His children. In the meantime, we'll pray. We'll gather together. We'll love each other. We'll laugh together. We'll cry. We'll grow in the Spirit. And we'll know that God is with us. We can learn three things from this message:

- 1. If Jesus was in the wilderness, where everything was dark, He was able to make it because there was light in that darkness. The word was with Him.**
- 2. If Jesus was there for slaves during their darkest hours, He can be there for us.**
- 3. The Lenten season is a time to look closely at our own lives and take responsibility for the mess we have created in our world and in our relationship.**

Amen.

Prayer For All People

God, with you, there is no darkness. Your character has no shadows, and you are pure and good. Yet, in our broken world, we see so much darkness around us. Pain, sickness, and disease are in our community and in many of our homes.

Lord, open our eyes to see the world, to see people as you see. Let us be slow to speak and quick to listen. Let all that we do be done in love, which covers over a multitude of sins. Help us, Father, to look not only to our own interests but also to the interests of others.

Bring your light and restoring presence to the dark places in our lives. Bring your hope to hearts that feel defeated. Bring your love and compassion to those in pain. Grant us the humility to allow your light to shine through the cracks in our lives, shine through the broken places in our institutional Church and in our world, in our families so that all may be healed. In the name of

*Jesus, the true light of the world. Nurture us daily in unjust places and your peace in places where no peace is to be found. Give us courage and strength when we are fearful and weak. Give us hope and forgiveness when we feel hopeless and angry. And guide us every step of the way as we walk toward the light. In Jesus name
Amen.*

Offertory Prayer:

*Heavenly Father, we miss placing our offering upon your altar as an outpouring of your light within us. But we still tell a story about what transpired on that old rugged cross when we give. May you bless everything that has been given on this day. Father bless every giver, bless those who are not able to give.
Amen.*

Children's Prayer:

Heavenly Father, open our ears to hear the cries of your neediest children. Open our eyes to see every child who is suffering. Draw us closer to the little ones who are depending on us for everything. Give all parents all the wisdom, strength, and guidance on how to raise these little ones. We thank you, Lord.

Amen.

Benediction

*As Christ is our light, let us go and be the light of the world.
As God has given us hope, let's go and give hope to others.
As we have been given the word to sustain us, let's share this word with others.
Go in Peace.*

Amen.