



Jesus - The Warrior Of Light



A Sermon By
Ms. Anna Broadbent

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Grace Episcopal Church
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The Fourth Sunday in Lent
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When I was younger I had three favorite books that I read and reread over and over. These books included *Anne of Green Gables*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, and *A Wrinkle in Time*. With that said, the only reason I didn't see *A Wrinkle in Time* on Thursday evening when it opened this past week was because I had class, so I had to settle for a Friday evening showing with a group of girlfriends. To prepare for the movie release, we all took a break from our theological studies and reread the book. For those of you who haven't read the book or taken time to see the movie over the past two days, it's a tough book to outline in a sermon, but it is about an epic battle between light and darkness. The heroine of the book is an adolescent girl named Meg who never quite found belonging anywhere... except with her father, who mysteriously goes missing. The first of Madeleine L'Engle's five book series follows Meg, her brother, and a friend as they go on a quest to be warriors of the light around the universe to try and find her father. With the support of the Misses - Which, Whatsit and Who - and many others, they join those who have been fighting against the darkness - past, present and future.

Once the kids truly experience the darkness or "IT" as they call it, they are overwhelmed at the task before them and they are scared; and rightly so. Mrs. Whatsit shares that there have been many warriors of light in the past. Calling them "Lights for us to see by," they included people like Leonardo da Vinci, Michaelangelo, Shakespeare, Bach, Madame Curie, St. Francis, Gandhi, and Buddha. Mrs. Who, who has evolved beyond language and therefore only speaks in quotes from others, says, "And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." Meg's brother yells, "JESUS! Of course Jesus! Jesus is the ultimate warrior of Light!"

The quote that Mrs. Who shared is from the Gospel of John, chapter one. Let me share just a bit more, starting with Chapter 1:3. "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." Christ is and has always been the ultimate warrior of light and is our guide on how also to be people of the light.

We are living in a world that is thick with darkness. Darkness, sin, and suffering permeate our very being and can be extremely powerful. We are all susceptible to the darkness, if we are willing to admit it. The darkness is anything that pulls us away from who God created us to be and taints the beautiful creation that God made. As we see in *A Wrinkle in Time*, the darkness can be found in eating disorders, jealousy, gun violence, racism, and in not being willing to acknowledge our own beauty and uniqueness. In our Old Testament reading today from Numbers, we see darkness as the Israelites impatience, lack of trust, and lack of gratitude for God's deliverance from Egypt. My favorite part of this passage is when the Israelites say, "For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." It's almost like when I was 15 years old and would go into the kitchen and stand in front of the refrigerator and say, "Moooom, I'm hungry, and we don't have any food." She would list off all the food she knew we had. I would be silent for a moment and say, "Yeah, but I detest that miserable food!"

The Israelites were so wrapped up in their Earthly dissatisfaction and frustration that they were being drawn into darkness. They were forgetting that God was with them and that all their needs were being met, even if they didn't like how they were being met. The darkness started to bite them in the form of the snakes. They had lost their connection with the light, with their source, God. Moses, who remained connected to the Light, prayed to have the snakes stop devouring the people. God commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent and have anyone who was bitten gaze upon it so that they would live. This serpent acted as the light for the Israelites. It pulled their attention away for the earthly darkness and helped them to focus upward, to the light. This is a huge quality of the light - it has the capacity to draw

us out and up, and it helps us to fix our focus on something bigger than ourselves, which in turns helps us to love ourselves and our neighbors a heck of a lot better.

Our Gospel passage from John today builds upon this story, in fact, referencing Moses and the serpent at the very start. It's actually an odd spot for our reading to start because it's right in the middle of a conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus about what it means to be born again of the spirit. Jesus references Moses because Nicodemus is a Pharisee and would know the Hebrew Scriptures well. When we hear this passage we often get caught up on verse 16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." This is actually a tricky verse for me, mainly because when this verse is interpreted, often the focus is on Jesus' sacrifice on the cross – which then is the source of our eternal life. This verse is at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry in John, not as he is moving towards death. I wonder what happens when we think of this verse with a focus not on the cross, but rather on Jesus' life, on his action here on Earth. Here's why I offer this suggestion. If we look at verses 19-21, we read, "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God." The judgment used here comes from the Greek word κρίσις, krisis, which means an ongoing judgment. Nothing about this passage is a one-time thing. This passage is not suggesting that if we believe in Jesus one time and accept him into our hearts that we are good, that we have eternal life. Rather, it is suggesting that it is a daily way of living. Reading on there is much discussion about light and darkness. What we are then challenged to do every day is to live into the light. This is where we can go back to John 3:16 and find intense comfort, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" Our belief in Jesus comes through our personal decision to accept the narrative of Jesus, his life, death, and resurrection, and it also comes through our decision to do the absolute best we can to model our lives after Jesus, and to follow him as our ultimate warrior of light – to live the way of the light.

As I've said, we all have moments in our lives in which we fall subject to the darkness. While this is attributed to our humanity, it also shows the true power of the darkness. This is why it is even more important to make sure that we ourselves are deeply connected to the source of all Light and why we need to be surrounding ourselves with others who are committed to the Light of Christ, just as we are doing right now, as Grace Church. When we are connected, it is much easier to ward off the darkness when it arrives, and when we are connected, we are also much more effective at reaching out to others who are in the darkness. Good people get stuck in the darkness at times, and as people of the light it is our job to reach out and act as a guide, just as Jesus does for us.

Just as the Misses did for Meg, once you find and connect to the Light of Christ and illuminate the light within yourself, you must work to bring out the light in others. We must spread the light. I pray that this Lenten season is offering you a space in which you are able to find ways to connect to your source and walk in the way of light. At the same time, I hope that you are finding that you are becoming more aware and more sensitive to the darkness.

As people of the light I believe that we are all called to witness to a specific darkness – I know many of us don't like that word, but what I mean is be present and be passionate about a specific darkness. For each of us it may be different. It could be the darkness of systemic racism, gun safety, child poverty, homelessness, LGBTQ equality, ecological justice, or a whole other host of darkness. It is not enough to simply be illuminated; we must shine in the darkness. If you're struggling to find a place to shine your light, please check out all the offerings that Grace has, and feel free to talk with any of our clergy about finding new and creative ways to shine.

I will close with a quote from Mrs. Which: "The only thing faster than Light is Darkness." I would add: is the only thing stronger than darkness is light. Thanks be to God.