

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7

John 1:1-18

Psalm 147 or 147:13-21

It's hard to believe that Christmas day was just this past Wednesday and here it is Sunday, first Sunday of Christmas, and you all are here. What are you doing here? My Christmas gift to Father Chris and Father Bill was to give them this weekend off. And don't feel sorry for me, I get all of next week off. But I was thinking, you know, it's so odd coming to church this weekend after Christmas, because I mean, Christmas Eve is just where we pull out all the stops.

I always wonder, literally if we pull out all the stops in the organ, but I mean, we, we just fill it with such festive cheer. I mean, the church is full – it's full with people who are joyous and just filled with glee over what is happening, and the merriment is overwhelming. And the music and the Word of God, it's just so beautiful and so festive and it's all because here on earth, we're offering the best of what has happened in Heaven, namely that God has come down to us and become incarnate.

So this first weekend after Christmas Day where we are still celebrating the birth of Christ. Technically it is the fifth day of Christmas, happy Christmas, but it's always known as low Sunday. So only the faithful are here. I mean, there's, there's fewer reasons, right, to come and worship God. There's, there's so much to be done to celebrate out in the world and you know, we probably have off from work if you work, and so I can get that the church is the farthest thing from people's minds, the people who aren't here.

But you're here and I wonder why. And I think you're here not just because you believe that going to church no matter what's going on in your lives is a good thing, right? It's good for you. It's good for your faith, it's good for your community, it's good for your world. And I believe that you're here not just because you have a sense of obligation to give God back an hour to worship God for the countless hours that God has taken care of you.

And I believe you're here not just because you want to come and see people you know and care for one another and love each other, and then to be reset from the week that has passed and be refreshed for the week to come. I think all of that is true, and yet there's another more significant reason that you are here.

I do love this chapter, this first chapter in the Gospel of John. It speaks to the light coming into a world that is filled with darkness, and when the light comes, there's a significant difference. In the midst of darkness. Light can only do what light does – shine brightly and dispel darkness. It has no other choice.

And it's fascinating to me to contemplate how light does that in darkness. I mean, if you think of the darkest and darkest of spaces where there's just absolutely nothing shining and you introduce a single candle, it has such power to overcome the contours of darkness. And that's because that's what light is. Light has the desire to dispel the dark. It has a desire to

bring warmth and understanding to all it touches, and so it is with God. God overcomes all things, rids us of our misunderstanding and makes all things clear and easy and beautiful and full and well.

There is a way that this verse is translated that I find absolutely fascinating. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it. Darkness doesn't get it. It doesn't understand light. But that's what's so extraordinary about light. Light doesn't seem to care. And so it is with God. God's presence overcomes our darkness and fills what we see and know and feel and touch with so much. It overtakes all that we see, our whole world view, and there is a word for that kind of light: abundance.

On Christmas Eve, this past Christmas Eve on Tuesday, for clergy it's a little bit of a marathon, as you can imagine. We show up at church and we don't stop really until like Christmas day. So we were just, you know, looking forward and it's wonderful and joyous. It is a little tiring. And at some point between one of those worship services, Father Bill turns to me and says, let's go to Starbucks. I was like, yes!

So we went to Starbucks to get their famous peppermint mocha. With whipped cream, of course. So we get in and they were open, but we were the only ones in there. And so we ordered our drinks and we're waiting for our delectable concoctions. And after we showed up, a bunch of other people came to get whatever they needed.

And so we were just standing there waiting for our drinks. And of course we had our clergy collars on, so we were visible. People knew what we did. And there was a woman who was also then waiting for her drink, and she kind of stared at us and I thought, oh, I'll just break the ice here. And I was like, "Happy Christmas!" And she's like, "Merry Christmas." Then she asked which church we went to and we told her, and we did that little back and forth.

And then I said to her, "Well, how's your Christmas celebration going?" And she said, "Oh wow, I'm so excited." And she told us a story of how when she was about six years old, she was going to St. Joe's in Pontiac, Catholic church over there, and she went in on Christmas Day and everybody was talking about the birth of Jesus and how excited they were that Jesus was born. And at the end when she was in the line and when everyone shakes the priest's hand, she said to the priest, "I don't understand. If it's the birthday of Jesus, why didn't we sing happy birthday?" And so the priest thought that was a fantastic idea. And he turned around and he had the rest of the congregation sing happy birthday.

She was delighted. But it wasn't over for her. Because she gets into the car and she's driving home with her parents and she turns to her mama and she said, well, if it's Jesus's birthday, surely we're going to have a cake. And mom who had probably spent like days in the kitchen making all these delectable treats and delights, Christmas cookies and so on and so forth, remembered that in the ice box she had stowed away a chocolate chip cake with cream cheese frosting, and she turned to her daughter and says, as a matter of fact, Jesus does have a birthday cake. His favorite, chocolate chip cake with cream cheese frosting.

And so there it was on Christmas day, they celebrated the joy of the birth of the Savior with a birthday cake for Jesus. And now 50 years later, she was at Starbucks to get her

fortification so that she can turn around and make Jesus a birthday cake. And as she was telling us this story, another woman who was standing in line came up to Bill and me and said, "Merry Christmas," and she handed us a Starbucks gift card and she said, "The Lord nudged me to give this to you." And I thought, that is abundance. We had a peppermint mocha in hand. We had a Starbucks gift card and a beautiful story.

And that's what happens. The light shines everywhere, even when you don't deserve it or need it. I think this is the reason that you and I are here on this fifth day of Christmas. We're here because we know God's most amazing property is abundance, abundant light, abundant mercy, abundant love poured over us. Never finished. Always available, more than enough, and then some, and that is the property of grace.

It's a Starbucks gift card even when you have a peppermint mocha. It's coming to church even though you've celebrated the birth of the Savior, and receiving more beautiful music, wonderful, joyful faces. The Eucharist, the body and blood of Jesus. It's generosity upon generosity.

David Los (sp?) describes this abundant nature of God in the form of gifts. God gives us so many gifts. God gives us the gift of taking on flesh. God didn't urge us to climb up where God is, but instead came down to us where we were. And if that weren't enough, the next gift God gives us is what he calls divine accommodation.

Setting us free from worrying about our own value, our own worth, and our own needs, and instead setting us loose to care for others; to make sure that they all know that they're loved and worth it. How are you living out of this life of endless abundance? Or are you in the dark and holding on to believing in scarcity?

Now, to be clear. I don't think scarcity happens when you're not feeling joyful, right? So I mean, sometimes we equate light with joy, and when you're sad or melancholy or depressed or down, we think, well then you're not participating in the light. And I disagree with that. And here's why. I think when you are experiencing difficulty in life and pain and suffering. The light shines and cares for you and is abundant and generous to you, and you simply have to let it take care of you.

Troy and I had our four parents die within two and a half years. And I mean, there's nothing unusual about that, right? Parents die. It's going to happen. So there was nothing really that we did to deserve or earn anything. And yet, we were showered with love, little acts of kindness, little words of comfort. The gift of people companioning with us, just sitting with me while I cried. That was God who came into our lives to let a small flame of hope shine in the midst of death.

So it's not suffering or melancholy or pain or difficulty that brings about scarcity. Scarcity is only brought about because we close our eyes to the blinding light. And we do that when we think that either we're not worth the light or the world is not worth the light or others aren't worth the light. When we think we're not good enough, that we're not deserving,

we're too fallen, we're too shameful, whatever it is. We just don't think that there's enough light to go around.

On this day of Christmas, the reason that you and I are here in church is to say to ourselves and to the world that there's more than enough light for everybody. It doesn't matter if you live a life and you think that there's no God or you act as if there's not enough light in the world or you don't recognize it or comprehend it or even want it. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot and will not and won't overcome it. You and I are here because we know the light wins. And that is the victory of our God that we celebrate during Christmas. So enjoy today. Enjoy worshiping God. Enjoy the music and being with one another and seeing each other's beautiful faces.

Enjoy the Eucharist. It is all given to us because there is an abundance, more than enough light to go around and then some. Merry Christmas.

[End of Recording]