



**NEW  
SCANDINAVIA  
LUTHERAN  
CHURCH  
NEWSLETTER 2023**

*The light shines in the  
darkness,  
and the darkness did not overcome it. John 1:5*

For many, this is a difficult time of year. For some, a lack of daylight can bring on *Season Affective Disorder*. For some, it is the first Thanksgiving/ Christmas/New Years without their loved one, either through death or separation. For some it is another year gone and no cure or treatment on the horizon.

All of this while we watch the news and see wars all over the world and even in this country. Gun violence is beyond comprehension. We see divisions between people based on race, sexual orientation, religion. We see the deep divide in Washington, DC and that seems to have filtered down to our families, which makes gathering a place of tension and fighting.

The world has become so dark that it is hard to find God in that darkness.

On my way into the office today, I was listening to a podcast. The host of the podcast was talking about research she used in a book she wrote years ago. She remembered the time when she was speaking with a man who was part of a religious movement/revival a few decades ago that put great emphasis on the miracles happening all around us. This host asked the man how he lives into the expectation of a miracle when proving the physical act seems impossible. The man reached into his pocket and pulled out a tiny flashlight and said "... when it comes to God, you need to carry a flashlight." That line has me thinking- not so much about a flashlight and miracles but a flashlight in a dark world. Sometimes we need a flashlight to find God in the darkness all around.

The gospel writer of John has promised us that "the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it" and while that seems a little cliché, I actually find some hope in that.

In June of 2016, a mass shooting happened at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, FL in which 49 people were killed and over 50 people were injured. I couldn't begin to imagine

the darkness within that space- literally, figuratively, and spiritually. The details were horrible. But little by little, stories came about that led me to believe there were elements of light within and around the place of hell (I call it that because I can't imagine hell being worse than what those people experienced). In the midst of hell people were encouraging others to play dead; people were putting themselves in harms way to protect the next person. In the aftermath, people were caring for the injured and supporting the hurting. People stood in line for hours to donate much needed blood. People were speaking out against that hatred showered up this bar and the patrons who were simply out for a fun night. I had parishioners come to me asking where God was in the midst of that hell and my answer was pretty simple- God was in every whisper that said "stay down". God was in every touch that accompanied "hold on. Help is almost here." God was crying for the shooter to stop. God was standing in line with those wanting to give blood and God was in the voices of those declaring that this act was wrong and things need to change. Even in hell, God can be found. We just need a flashlight.

I once had a conversation with a woman who was dying of cancer. Her voice was faint as I asked her where she felt joy in the midst of all that is cancer; the treatment, the side effects, the loss of hope for a recovery. At first, I think the lady thought I was crazy until she really took in the question. It was as if a light went on and a smile came across her face. She spoke about her children and how proud she was of them. She spoke about the joy when the grandchildren would come to the hospital and sit with her in her hospital room which was so small that there was a limit of 3 people at a time to visit (which included chaplains) as that was all the room would hold. I have no doubt in saying that the light that came on was that of God even in the midst of darkness. *"The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it."*

Like I said, this is a difficult time of the year as darkness is all around but that doesn't mean there is no light, and that God is not present. In fact, it is the exact opposite. God *is* present and darkness will never win. God has promised never to leave us and to be with us in our joys and sorrow. Sometimes the darkness can be overwhelming, but it is only in darkness that light is visible. And when all else fails, grab a flashlight.

God's peace be with you always.

Pastor Sara

