

“Send Out Your Light”

Psalm 43:3

MISSION FESTIVAL SERMON

NOTE: Preachers can expand the following, as appropriate.

I.

The USS *Jeannette* made an expedition to the North Pole in 1879, but its trip was guided by what turned out to be faulty maps. These maps assumed that there was a “thermometric gateway” through the ice and that this gateway opened into a big polar sea at the top of the world. The crew of the *Jeanette* discovered the hard way that this assumption was false. They could find no such opening in the ice. The ship sank, and at length one-third of the crew died. Misled, the expedition failed.

The psalmist said to God, “*Send out Your light and your truth.*” Today our world hungers and thirsts for truth. You often hear, “Follow the science.” But the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that science is done by scientists, people who often end up confused themselves: “Don’t wear a mask . . . No, wear a mask.” And it stand out as more than possible that, like the people who relied on those faulty maps of the North Pole, we can end up believing some falsehoods largely because we want to believe them.

With regard to eternally important things, lost and condemned creatures like us cannot have the truth unless God opens up a gateway, as it were. “*Send out Your light and Your truth,*” the psalmist prayed. Jesus is the Light of the world, God of God and Light of Light. He is the Truth, as well as the Life and the Way. He, the Truth, comes to us and sets us free from confusions and illusion.

Like the psalmist, we too pray, “*Send out Your light and Your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your dwelling!*” For people desperately need the Lord’s leading.

II.

We need more than information, though. For we are not merely misinformed. We are workers of iniquity. Hear what God’s Word says: “None is righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10, quoting Psalm 14:3 and Psalm 53:3).

If it is to God’s holy hill that His light and His truth are leading us, that can be terrifying. Which worker of iniquity can stand before the holy God? So Jesus did more than simply to clear up our thinking. He, the Good Shepherd, came to seek out His wayward sheep and lay down His life for them, only to take it up again in His Easter victory.

During World War I, a soldier asked to go into “no man’s land” and bring back a wounded buddy. The officer in charge granted permission, yet he warned the young man of the risks. “Your friend is probably dead” anyway, the officer said. Still, the soldier risked it. He got to his buddy, hoisted him on his shoulders, and stumbled back to friendly lines. The officer stood there waiting. He took a look at the wounded man and told the soldier, “I’m sorry. Your friend is dead. Now it seems you have been hit yourself too.” It was worth it, though, the soldier replied. When he first reached his buddy, the buddy was still alive, and he whispered: “I knew you’d come.”

For centuries, God's people had the light of prophecy and the truth of God's Word to tell them that the Christ would come, not to condemn but to save, to make Himself an offering for sin. Fervently could they pray, "*Send out Your light and Your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your dwelling!*" How much more can we pray these same words today!

III.

For today, no less than in ancient times, people need to be led and brought into God's dwelling. And this is not only for the long haul of eternity, important as it obviously is to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. We have more Good News: sinners can stand in the gracious presence of God right now. The Lord dwells with His forgiveness in His church, among His people.

In Old Testament times God dwelled in Israel, especially in the temple. After Christ came, Paul wrote to God's people at Corinth, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and the God's Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). The Spirit is in the church because God's Word is in the church. As the Augsburg Confession pointed out, the church is "the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered" (CA VII).

Some years ago, an old widower lived alone in New York City. His neighbors did not know him very well, but they started missing him. No one had seen him for quite a while. The neighbors called the police, who got a key to the man's apartment and found him in a coma, near death. An ambulance rushed him to the hospital, where the doctors discovered that he was starving. That made no sense. He had food on the cabinet shelves of his apartment and in his refrigerator. Why didn't he eat? The question had to wait until he came to. Why didn't he eat? Because, the man said, he had no one to eat with.¹

In the church God has given us people to eat with, fellow saints with whom to rejoice as we gather around God's Word, as it were, at His holy hill and His dwelling. In fact, we eat the holy body and drink the precious blood of Christ that bought and paid for our salvation. And we do so together.

Then we go into our various vocations in the world. Through our witness in these vocations, God continues to send out the same light and truth by which He called us. Who wouldn't want to be part of this? Who wouldn't want, even at some risk, to go get our dying buddies? (These "buddies" may include people we hardly know!) Who wouldn't want to see that other poor sinners have someone to eat with in the Kingdom of God? Jesus came to seek and save the lost, and He sweeps us up into this mission.

When we say to our Father, "Thy kingdom come," one of the things we are saying is, "*Send out Your light and Your truth.*" Send them out, O Lord, among other ways, through us.

¹ This story, as well as the one above about the soldier, is from *The Lutheran Hour*, Feb. 23, 2014. Copyright owned by International Lutheran Laymen's League, used with permission of Lutheran Hour Ministries, all right reserved.