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Guest Preacher, January 15, 2023

*May we shine with the radiance of Christ's Glory, and may we see  
Christ coming through one another. Amen.*

Today's readings are centered on Light and Love—on relationship and the building of beloved community. Something made astonishingly clear in these passages is that sometimes God's call to us arrives through unexpected people and means. In today's Old Testament reading, Israel's call to restoration came through a foreign king, King Cyrus of Persia, who rescued them from Babylonian captivity and facilitated their pilgrimage back to their homeland. I'm calling it a pilgrimage because, contextually, the Jewish people were being called to return to a covenantal relationship with God by way of God's grace-filled liberation through Cyrus, an unexpected instrument of God in this story. And they will be discerning this contentious turn of events during their long journey homeward.

In today's Epistle, we receive encouragement from the Apostle Paul, another unlikely instrument of God—a ruthless persecutor turned tireless servant-leader. Paul encourages the Corinthians to rely upon the gifts that God has granted them for strength and perseverance as they await Christ's second coming—encouragement that is useful for us as we wait, as well. God enriches us with spiritual gifts that call us into right relationship with Christ and with one another.

And in today's Gospel reading, we receive encouragement through the witness of John the Baptist, an unhoused person who wanders the desert wearing a coarse camel-hair garment and subsisting on a diet of locusts and wild honey--crying out in the wilderness to all with ears to hear:

*HERE is the Lamb of God. THIS is the Son of God.*

Three scripture readings. Three unlikely instruments (or servants) of God, or so it must have seemed at the time. And one Divinely life-giving message.

God provides.  
Jesus saves.  
And WE abide.

We abide with Love.

We love one another as Christ loves us. And that love is manifest in many ways.

Paul tells us that God so loves us that God enriches us with spiritual gifts that call us into right relationship—with God and with one another—gifts like wisdom, mercy, faith, and service.

And baptism escorts us into that right relationship. So, God sends John the Baptizer out into the wilderness not only to baptize, but to proclaim the Good News of Christ's arrival, and His offering of redemption.

*THIS is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*

The Baptismal Covenant serves as a BLUEPRINT for that right relationship. A blueprint for a solid foundation in Christ.

*Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?  
Will you seek and serve Christ in ALL persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?*

*Will you strive for justice and peace among all people,  
and respect the dignity of every human?*

And the people say: YES! WE WILL—WITH GOD'S HELP! A solid blueprint of faith in action.

Today is the eve of Martin Luther King, Jr., Day—a day our nation sets aside for the remembrance of the Baptist minister and civil rights activist who laid a foundation for non-violent resistance against discrimination in America and blazed a path toward social justice with the Civil Rights Movement.

Shortly before his death, King preached a sermon about life's "blueprint." He allegorized formation and growth as an architect creating a blueprint for the building of life. At the time, he was speaking to an auditorium full of teenagers. But his message is timeless, and we might do well to remember it.

In his allegory, he stressed the utmost importance of dignity and self-worth. He called it "somebodiness." Everybody is *somebody*, and we mustn't forget that! When the people of St. John's feed the hungry or care for the unhoused, they are making those people visible, seen, and valued—somebody—somebody worth caring about.

In the same address, King stressed the importance of discerning vocation. What are you called to do? Who and how are you called to be? As a person? As a congregation? As a nation? This is an area where St. John's really shines—where St. John's emanates the light of Christ brightly. St. John's shines with the radiance of Christ's Glory through its missional outreach and stewardship.

When you set out to build your new worship space, this beautiful building—this amazing campus—you intentionally sought to respond to the needs of the surrounding community—your neighbors. You lovingly deployed parishioners to canvass the local neighborhoods in order to discern the community's unmet needs so that you might serve them.

And you created a missional blueprint of your outreach and your purpose called the *Architectural Implications of St. John's Mission and Hopes*—an intentional outline of mission and service. You intentionally sought to feed the hungry. You intentionally sought to shelter the unhoused, clothe the poor, welcome the stranger, heal the afflicted, and provide after-school care for your youngest neighbors.

I recently read the history of this building—how it came to be, why it came to be. The lived faith of St. John's is inspirational. Your perseverance, and your resourcefulness, and especially your faith breathe the essence of the baptismal covenant.

You LIVE it—intentionally—and with God's help.

King's ministry was centered upon God's call to love one's neighbor as one's self—a key tenet of the baptismal covenant.

King is quoted as saying:

*Before I was a civil rights leader, I was a preacher of the Gospel. . . .all that I do in civil rights I do because I consider it a part of my ministry. (1967)*

He also said:

*In our quest to make neighborly love a reality, we have the life of our Christ to guide us.*

We have that Light of Christ within ourselves.

When you built showers into your church's architectural blueprint in order to meet the needs of your community, you shine the light of Christ.

When you value all of your neighbors and the diversity of their needs by making space for them in your missional blueprint, you shine the light of Christ.

When you intentionally create a space that is accessible and safe, seeking to make life better for all by embodying love and justice, you shine the light of Christ.

Christ is the Light of the World, and as we love and serve Christ and our neighbors, we project that light—we embody the light of Christ. When we embody the light of Christ through our actions, we see Christ in and through one another. We see Christ coming, and we declare:

*Here is the Lamb of God, the One who takes away the sin of the world*

Just as Christ is safe and accessible, you intentionally set out to create a sanctuary of safety, love, and accessibility, where ALL are truly welcome. And like John the Baptist, you cry out in the wilderness through your actions:

*THIS is the son of God.  
THIS is the work of Christ.*

Christ lifted up the poor and the oppressed. He welcomed the stranger. He fed the hungry and soothed the suffering. He healed the afflicted. Christ even washed the feet of his disciples. And Christ did all of these things so that we might follow in his footsteps and continue his mission of love. And so, I say to you,

*Abide in God. (Continue to abide in God)  
Shine with the radiance of Christ's Glory.  
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
And may we see Christ coming through one another.  
Amen.*