

There's a parable in Indian philosophy that goes like this:

A man walks along a path at night. Suddenly he sees a poisonous snake just a few steps ahead of him. He turns and runs in the opposite direction, and then waits till morning to continue on his way, hoping the snake will have moved far away by then. As he heads on down the path, he comes across a coiled rope. He realizes that in the darkness he had thought the rope was a snake. In the dark, it's hard to see reality as it truly is. In the light of day, we see more clearly.¹

Living in this world so often feels like being that man walking a path at night. This world feels dark, confusing, and dangerous. I mean, we have a police officer here at church today – a decision none of us wanted to have to make. But when we're not sure when the shadow on the path in front of us is a snake or just a rope, well, we do the best we can.

But even aside from the obvious darkness and fears that pop up in our world – the kinds of things that make news headlines – the powers of this world also work to make us see the world in certain ways. These powers lead us to feel afraid rather than hopeful; to act divided rather than united. These powers train us up in prejudices, tell us there's not enough to go around. And, as Pastor Lippard talked about in his sermon last Sunday, the powers of this world often conspire to confuse us, making us wonder if there even is such a thing as truth.

As Christians, we believe that Jesus Christ is the light that helps us to see the truth – and the world – more clearly. The Gospel of John says that Jesus is “the true light, which enlightens everyone” (John 1:9) When someone is baptized into the Way of Jesus, we remind them that they have become a child of the Light as we light their baptismal candle from the Christ candle and saying: “Jesus said, ‘I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’” (John 8:12).

God enlightens us through Jesus – through his teachings and the continuing presence of the Spirit with us. God enlightens us to help us see through the darkness of this world, to see the light of Christ lighting our way and our understanding; and God lights our path so that we can see more than shadows, so that we can see God in this world.

The book I read during the children's sermon encouraged us to see God at work in the world, even when it feels like God is hard to see. The grandmother teaches her grandson: “God is here...You just need to know where to look. Whenever you see love, joy, and peace, God is there...Wherever there's patience, kindness, and goodness, God is there, too. When you see faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, that's God's Spirit at work.”²

1 “The Rope and the Snake” (*Rajjusarpa Nyaya*), a story from Vedantic philosophy; referenced from “Vedantic Philosophy: The Snake and the Rope,” *PrantaShanti Yoga Center*, 16 January 2015. <http://pranashanti.com/yoga-stories/vedantic-philosophy-the-snake-and-the-rope> Accessed 2 November 2019.

2 Jennifer Grant, *Maybe God is Like that Too*, (Minneapolis: Sparkhouse, 2017).

It's sort of like the famous quote from Mr. Rogers:

“My mother used to say...whenever there would be any [real] catastrophe that was in the movies or on the air, she would say, ‘Always look for the helpers. There will always be helpers. Even just on the sidelines.’ ... Because if you look for the helpers, you’ll know that there’s hope.”³

These are reminders that God opens our eyes open to see God at work in the world, even when God seems hard to find, even when the world seems dark and violent and wrong – God is here, and we are given eyes to see God with us.

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus actually challenges us to go even further than that. Jesus tells us that God will open our eyes even wider – to see God at work not only in the bright flashes of love, joy, and peace in our world, but also to see God in the midst of life’s hardships, to see God in our trusting anticipation that God will one day make things better.

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

It’s like Jesus is telling us that even in those times when we feel there is no goodness to be seen, no kindness to be felt, no peace to be had in this world, God is still there. Even then. Just look. God will help you see.

If God is for us, [what can be] against us?...[What] will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword?...No...neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:31, 35, 38).

That promise is the light that Jesus Christ gives to us. That promise is the truth that Jesus Christ lived for us, when he – who was equal with God (Phil. 2:6) – became flesh, became a vulnerable human being, got dirty, got rejected, ate with sinners, felt heartbreak, felt fear and pain, even felt death. God became human and lived in this world with all its darkness, confusion, violence, and lies, so that we could see that God was there, God was incarnate in this same, broken world. So that we could see that God is here. God was here. God will always be here, with us.

And on this All Saints Sunday we remember: to be filled with that promise is to be a saint. And while we remain sinners, still stuck to the darkness and brokenness of this world, God makes us saints, fills us with that promise that helps us to see the world by the light of Christ. And as we see differently, we live differently.

3 From an interview of Fred Rogers by the Archive of American Television. Quote excerpt: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LGHtc_D328 Full interview: <https://interviews.televisionacademy.com/interviews/fred-rogers> Accessed 2 November 2019.

So as, during his time on earth, Jesus helped us to see the love of God for us and for all people and all Creation, Jesus also taught us what it means to see the world through that love and to live in that love. He taught us:

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

This is so the opposite of the selfishness and fear that this world teaches us that it sounds crazy, doesn't it? And yet when these actions are done in strength – not like, *Hey, you hit me, but I'm a doormat, so I'm not doing anything about it*, but rather, *We chose to live in the courage of love and generosity, out of faith in God's love and generosity* – When we live this way in strength, God uses us to dispel the darkness, lies, and confusion of this world. When God enlightens us, God uses us to enlighten the world.

This is what we are reminded of in the book of Ephesians:

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ...may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

That power is the light of Christ, which now burns in us. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it (John 1:5).