



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – Christmas 1 – December 31, 2017: The Eucalyptus Leaves

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

I can relate.

When I was in high school, my grandparents and I moved from Guam to the home they built on the Big Island and where my mother had been house sitting for them for almost a year. My grandparents' house is in the middle of a rain forest, on a 5-acre plot, and it is so isolated that you can't see or hear any of the neighbors.

I asked my mother how she could live in that house all alone for almost a year and whether or not she felt safe. And she told me that she often practiced walking in the yard in the dark so that if anyone came, all she would do was turn off all the lights, go into the yard, and no one would ever be able to find her.

And she was so good at it that she could walk a quarter-mile from the house down to the bamboo grove that was the original site of our family homestead, built by my great-grandparents in 1902. So, over the course of several weeks, my mother taught me how to walk in my grandparents' yard in the dark of night—without any flashlights. And I got to be very good at it.

One night, I went walking and the night sky was clear. There was absolutely no moonlight in the yard and it was completely dark. I still decided I would walk to the bamboo grove and off I went, traipsing down well-worn trails when I noticed something.

Our family homestead is in the middle of a eucalyptus forest and when the leaves fall off the trees, they become phosphorescent. When I looked down to the ground that night, I saw a glow coming off the dead leaves on the ground. And in that pitch-black darkness, the phosphorescence lit my path and helped me find my way.

Darkness cannot overcome the light.

This is a tough notion to accept in a world that seems to have a lot of gray area in it these days. We can't be certain of anything, it seems. Our constant access to information shows us that things change rapidly and we can't count on anything. And so, in the midst of this, this gospel sidesteps the drama of virgin birth, shepherds in the fields, and angels singing in glory.

Instead, Jesus simply comes to us as the Word of God. Pure and simple. No gray area. In the darkness of our ambiguity and doubt, we have the light of Christ brought about by the power of an ingenious Creator who loves us so much that God sends God's son to be with us and experience us as fully as God possibly can.

The thing is, you'll notice in my story about walking in the yard at night that I didn't notice the light coming from the leaves on the ground right away. It took time. My eyes needed time to adjust. And it's the same way with the light of Christ. Our spirits need time to adjust to that light as well.

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That's why we had the season of Advent, time to prepare for the light so that we could see it. And then when that light comes, it may overpower us. But as our eyes adjust, we begin to see the light for what it really is. And when you think about it, this is how the world received Jesus.

The light was so strong and we couldn't figure it out, so ultimately, we rejected it. And the lesson in that for you and me is to not do the same thing yet again—to reject the Christ in our midst in whatever form it may come. And from that place we can come to believe that God indeed loved us so much that God chose to live as one of us and to be one with us.

And thank God for that, because you and I both know that life is more interesting in the light than it is in the dark and when I noticed the light coming from the leaves off the eucalyptus trees, I wasn't just focused on where my feet were. I also focused on where they were going.

And at that point I had to make a decision—a decision whether to stay in the darkness or follow the light. After all, I could've closed my eyes and stayed where I was. But somehow, I felt called to do something bigger and walk in the light. And to quote Shelley D.B. Copeland:

To believe and see means making a decision. When the light comes, one must choose either to stay in the anonymity of darkness or to move forward in the familiarity of light. Darkness is somehow relaxed and distant. Light is intimate in the midst of visibility and understanding. The question we each must answer for ourselves is, would you rather live your life in the dark or in the light?

The thing is, when we live in the light, we also see our shadows. But we have to have faith that the light will overcome the darkness of our shadows. We also have to understand that light generates heat, and we may find ourselves going toward the light and landing in conflict and controversy. That's what it can mean to follow the light. And while that can be a scary thing, perhaps we have to step out in faith, knowing that we are loved, loved by God.

So this Christmas, let's all make a decision to see and follow the light, including the light within. And may the light of Christ that emanates from our open and vulnerable spirits and souls be like beacons in the darkness to those who long to see the light, to feel its warmth, and to know its loving presence.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Amen.