

Have you ever written an entire document and then after you read it and reread it, you did the good ole' copy the WHOLE document and hit delete?

Well, that is what happened to me this week with this sermon. So, if the sermon is an absolute train wreck this morning, I apologize and maybe I can send you my original thoughts in sermon one.

As my sermon shifted in the new direction, I became anxious. Here we are on the first Sunday of the new year. Thus, in most of our minds, we have reflected on 2021 and are looking ahead to 2022. Now, don't worry, you are safe in this space, I will not ask you if you have already broken your 2022 resolution.

However, for myself, as the pastor of Bay View, I wanted to reflect on 2021 as a church and look ahead to this year while doing it through the lens of the Scriptures that we read today and the last couple of weeks.

In a sense, I feel like we have come a long way in the nine and a half months that I have been here. It began with us opening up the church building and allowing the staff and church members having access to this beautiful space. Then, in May, we had the confirmation students host a confirmation fair and then had their affirmation of baptism service in person.

The following week, we opened up this space for the two worship services on Sunday. At first, we had ropes up as we were trying to figure out the appropriate protocols and then of course the masks that are still with us.

We then took another step and we had summer camp outside for the kids and then we took another step which allowed coffee and fellowship after the 8 am service as well as adding children and youth programming in the fall.

Yet, some of us struggle, including me, as we look around and see the number of individuals who are here worshipping with us. We wish there were more. Maybe they have moved away. Maybe they are still not comfortable coming here because Covid-19 has not disappeared. There are some who just slipped away when the doors were shut. There are some that ran away because of the changes that occurred in the pastoral leadership of the church. We then grieve for those who have died. Since, I came here in March, we have had twelve funerals.

If you and I am not careful, some of that can be a little depressing. Yet, let us allow the Holy Spirit to blow and listen into the Gospel message that we just read. Did you hear John's powerful words? Let me remind you of them again. Hear the good news from John:

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

In the past, I have had conversations with devoted churchgoers who held onto the following position: the light is in here and the darkness is out there and we, churchgoers, need to carry the light out into the darkness.

And if I am being honest with you, I have held onto that thought and most likely even spoke those words. But, this is another instance where my thoughts have shifted. Now, I lean into the concept that the light and the darkness are all around us and throughout the world.

So, what does that mean for me or for Bay View?

I think that the darkness often chews on my ear quite a bit. I might not be able to explain this as well as I should be able to, but let me try. Many times, I believe that darkness builds upon my insecurities. In that light, I think that it feeds upon the lie that "big" is the only sign of success.

It seems to be all around us, right?

So, PJ how many were in attendance for the book club?

Hey PJ, how many individuals were there for the Christmas Eve services?

PJ, how many individuals do you really think are going to come to the weekly bible studies?

Be honest with me PJ, are you concerned about how many fill in the blank.

Believe me, I would love to answer all of those with high numbers. If there were high numbers, we (I) could pat ourselves on the back and think that we are doing a great job. But Yes, there is a but.

Let's take a look at this from a different angle. Can we look at it through the lens of light?

Over the last nine and a half months, I have seen many areas where the church has expressed faith, hope and love. Bay View has continued to pour out generosity and hospitality to those around us. I believe that there have been multiple times where we have expressed acts of creativity. When I examine the spiritual life of BVLC, I have been encouraged by the comments regarding the daily readings, sermon critiques, and interest in the bible studies. Then I have to tell you that I have been involved in numerous studies and book clubs and the depth of our conversations on Monday night for "*Baptized in Tear Gas*" was profound. I look forward to more studies and conversations in 2022.

Last week, I shared from Colossians, I want to re-highlight the five words from last week: Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Meekness, and Patience.

Here is the connection, in my mind. John tells us that Jesus came into the world not to spread darkness but to light the darkness up. We can also take this one step further. *Jesus does not lead us into the ways of futility and despair.*

Jesus came into this world to fill us with new life, encourages us and to show us how to grow. The challenge for us is to block out the noise that comes from the darkness and cling to the light. When we do this, we can measure success in a different light; no pun intended and see where growth has occurred.

If we embody the five words of Colossians and claim them as our core values and then when we live out our baptismal vows, we will be able to hold onto the promises that God has given to us.

I have not made a big dive into the Gospel reading, so let us take a quick plunge into the reading. This passage is a game-changer for us, as Christians. This passage clearly states to us that *God choosing to put skin on and walk among us is one of the pivotal points in salvation history.* The dwelling of God is a deeply intimate, personal claim and this claim assumes God's commitment to and continually with God's people.

Then, we have one of the most powerful statements in the book of John in the opening prologue. John tells us that the God of the universe decided to pitch a tent with humanity. *When God does this, God has empowered us to become children of God.*

Everything is about God in this passage. We, as children of God need to remember this and allow our lives point to God. John was continuously pointing to Jesus. We need to point to God. It really is not about me, it is not about you. However, we are part of the story and our part of the story can be a simple, yet beautiful expression. Point to Jesus.

Last week, I highlighted bear witness. It circles back to that this week. In verse 8, we hear, "*He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.*"

If you have never heard the song, I want to give you an assignment. Look up Casting Crowns "Only Jesus" song. Here are the words in the chorus:

I don't want to leave a legacy

I don't care if they remember me

Only Jesus

And I-I-I, I've only got one life to live

I'll let every second point to Him

Only Jesus

This morning, let me close out the sermon with a prayer. Dear God, remind us in our darkest moment that we are not alone, that you have come to be with us and for us forever. In Jesus' name, **Amen.**