

CHRISTMAS MORNING WITH CHRIST

John 1:1-13

We gather this morning to bear witness once again to a simple truth: the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. When God's people have tried to get their mind wrapped around what the glory and greatness of God is like, they have been drawn again and again to the image of light. This morning I want to share a story with you, as shared by Dr. James Dobson, that testifies or witnesses to Christ's light.

Stella Thornhope was an elderly woman who was struggling with her first Christmas alone. Her husband had died just a few months prior through a slow developing cancer. Several days prior to Christmas she was almost snowed in by a brutal weather system. She felt terribly alone. Her world seemed so full of darkness so she decided she was not going to decorate for Christmas.

As she sat by herself all day, late that afternoon the doorbell rang, and there was a delivery boy with a box. He said, "Mrs. Thornhope?" She nodded. He said, "Would you sign here?" She invited him to step inside and closed the door to get away from the cold. She signed the paper and said, "What's in the box?" The young man laughed and opened up the flap, and inside was a little puppy, a golden Retriever. The delivery boy picked up the squirming pup and explained, "this is for you, Ma'am. He's six weeks old." The young puppy began to wiggle in happiness at being released from captivity.

“Who sent this?” Mrs. Thornhope asked.

The young man set the animal down and handed her an envelope and said, “It’s all explained here in this envelope, Ma’am. The dog was bought last July while its mother was still pregnant. It was meant to be a Christmas gift to you.” The young man then handed her a book authored by many who had experienced this same gift.

In desperation she again asked, “Who sent me this puppy?”

As the young man turned to leave, he said, “Your husband, Ma’am. Merry Christmas.”

She opened up the letter from her husband. He had written it three weeks before he died and left it with the kennel owners to be delivered with the puppy as his last Christmas gift to her. The letter was full of love and encouragement and admonishments to be strong. He vowed that he was waiting for the day when she would join him. He had sent her this young animal to keep her company until then.

She wiped away the tears, put the letter down, and then remembering the puppy at her feet, she picked up the golden furry ball and embraced it. Then she looked out the window at the lights that outlined the neighbor’s house, and she heard from the radio in the kitchen the strains of “Joy to the world, the Lord has come.” Suddenly, Stella felt the most amazing sensation of peace washing over her. Her heart felt a joy and wonder that turned her previous state of darkness into light.

“Little fella,” she said to the dog, “it’s just you and me. But you know what? There’s a box down in the basement I’ll bet you’d like. It’s got a little Christmas tree in it and some decorations and lots of lights that are going to impress you. And there’s a manger scene down there. Let’s go get it.”

Just as Mrs. Thornhope experienced, in today’s gospel we read about darkness and light. Let us not be silent about the darkness for it is real. Since the beginning there has been darkness and light. We all experience the darkness yet, let us pay attention to the light. It is present or what we may call a gift. As we light the candle at Christmas, it represents the hope of the world, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Even for those of us who have experienced the lighting of this candle for many Christmases, the Christ candle is always new. Even for those of us who could recite the Christmas scripture from memory, the good news is always a needed word, an honest word, a word of comfort, a hope-filled word.

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