

REFLECTION – March 14 2021

Many of our church buildings are still closed due to COVID, but most of us will have a church building to go back to someday. That's not true for all faith communities.

At 10:38 p.m., on February 18 of this year, the Community of Christ Church in Aramillo, Texas was destroyed by fire, caused by arson.

A 24-year-old man phoned his father to tell him that he had set the fire. The father phoned the police, who arrested the son.

I heard about this while I was on a Zoom gathering the following Tuesday. I was on a gathering of people studying the Lord's Prayer. One of the participants is a man named Larry, who lives in Texas and is a member of the Community of Christ Church.

In the coming days, the members of the congregation were invited to join a Zoom call to talk about their reactions to the fire.

Larry said he was concerned about how that meeting would go. He said he was concerned because this was Texas! He was concerned that the meeting would become a forum for calls for vengeance and anger.

Instead, the people of that faith community were concerned about the person who had committed the arson. They wondered how they could reach out to him and his family to be supportive and to care. Some said they had been trying to find out when the accused would appear in court so that they could be there as a silent presence of prayer and concern for this young man.

After Larry finished telling this story, no one else who was on the Zoom gathering spoke for awhile.

We had just heard a story that put us in the presence of THE STORY of Jesus.

"For God so loved the world," says the writer of John's Gospel, "that God gave to the world God's Son – not Caesar, who claimed the title of Son of God – but Jesus – God's Son, God's emissary, the one God has given to the world, God's gift to the world.

God sent Jesus not to condemn the world...not to condemn. Not to assign blame, not to punish, not to completely reject and not to be finally-and-forever- more finished with the world.

Given to the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him, the world might be saved.

The world might be saved – the world might truly be God's world.

Saved, says the writer of John's gospel, because light has come into the world. Jesus is a light given to the world by God.

Sometimes we look at a light – the light of stars in the night sky or the light shining through the window of a cabin at the end of a trail we are following at dusk.

But usually we do not look directly at a light. Instead, the light is what allows us to see the world we inhabit.

We look at Jesus and we see hands breaking bread and sharing the pieces; we see feet walking dusty roads from village to village; we see eyes that contain depths of compassion.

But mostly we see not Jesus but we see the world as it is because of Jesus. When the disciples of John the Baptizer asked Jesus if he was the One sent from God, he told them to tell John what “you see – you see the lame walking, the blind seeing, the hungry being fed.” Tell John what you see because of the light by which you see.

Jesus is the light that invites us to see the world in the light of God’s love and God’s creation. The light of Jesus allows us to see the sacred in everyone and everything.

The image of light is found in other faith traditions.

The last words of the Buddha are said to have been, “Make of yourself a light.”

There is another story of the Buddha that I find is light for seeing the world. The Buddha was sitting under a tree. A young man walking by, saw Buddha, thought that Buddha was well overweight, and said to the Buddha, “You look like a pig.” Buddha looked at the young man and said, “You look like God.” Surprised, the young man asked, “Why would you say that?” to which Buddha replied, “We see what’s inside us. I think about God all day and when I look out that is what I see. You, obviously, must think about other things.”

God gives to the world the light of Christ, a light by which we may see God in the geese overhead, in yellow blades waiting to become the green grass of summer, in still water, but a light by which we may also see God in the soul of everyone we meet.

The world, each of us, is already too good at condemning, criticizing, rejecting and shaming – Christ is given not to condemn, but to show us the world saturated with the light of God, the love of God, the holiness of God.

Given to see the light of God, the image of God, the Christ, within ourselves and everyone else.

For God so loved the world...because that is God...the deep, profound, awesome love that allows us to see the world as one creation; the love that reconciles and that saves.

The light has come into the world. The light has come into the world in Christ. The light has come into the world in each of us. Let us see the world by the light of God’s love. Let us be lights, so that by our words and actions, others will see God in the world, and see the world held within God’s love.

Thanks be to God. AMEN

For reflection:

How do you react to the story of the church in Texas? What do you think about the congregation's reaction?

In what ways does the life of Jesus influence the way you see the world and the way you see other people?

How can you be a 'light in the world' during the coming week?