



## The Generosity of the Sun

Calvary Church, United Methodist  
Sermon by Rev. John Mueller, Nov 12, 2000

**Scripture Reading:**  
**Isaiah 60:1-5a**

*<sup>1</sup> Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. <sup>2</sup> For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. <sup>3</sup> And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. <sup>4</sup> Lift up your eyes round about, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be carried in the arms. <sup>5</sup> Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice;*

**Scripture Reading:**  
**John 1:1-13, 8:12**

*<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God: <sup>3</sup> all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. <sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. <sup>9</sup> The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. <sup>12</sup> But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

*<sup>12</sup> Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

**Sermon:**

Some of you may be wondering why we sang an Advent and Christmas hymn two weeks before Thanksgiving!?! Has Rev. John caved in to the pressures our society places upon us to celebrate Christmas -weeks - even months before it arrives?! That's an amazing phenomena isn't it? Two weeks before Halloween I was in a store and saw the isles being filled with Christmas stuff - have you noticed this?! The middle of October! To me this is a disturbing trend in our society - we're bombarded with advertisements, images, even music for Christmas months before we get to the season. And to make matters worse, most of the stuff we're bombarded with has very little to do with the real meaning of Christmas - but it's everywhere.

It seems we're having a harder time knowing how to wait in our society. You're at a traffic light and if you're not racing out of the lane as soon as the light changes - somebody is beeping their horn at you. We're having a harder time being patient today it seems. What about the election this past week. Is the news media patient? What a bizarre couple of days! Florida is declared by all the media to be Al Gore's, then this is retracted. Then Florida is declared to be George Bush's, then this is retracted! Even the headlines of the Boston Globe changed a few times. Everyone wants

to get the word out first - everyone wants to be ahead of the others! Everyone is so impatient. And because patience is not only a virtue, but rare these days, it takes discipline to not give in to the temptation to celebrate Christmas too soon; not to want something before it's time. No wonder why many of us are so wiped out and even thankful when the Christmas season is over - its been going on for three months!!

But this isn't the reason why I invited us to sing "Hark the Herald Angels Sing." The reason why is to see how observant you are. Did anyone notice something interesting, something curious about the words of the first two hymns we sang today? Maybe I need to give you a little hint. It has to do with a phrase about "righteousness." Now can you see it?

Both of these hymns are speaking about Jesus, the son of God, yet both of them spell "son," sun! Now this isn't a typo. These hymn writers - Charles Wesley, one of the founders of Methodism being one of them - are playing a little game with us. A game that's perhaps meant to get us to reflect upon the nature of Jesus, and the significance of his life. Indeed it seems that the hymn writers are suggesting the word "son" and "sun" are almost interchangeable. Are there parallels? Can we learn some things about Jesus from our magnificent day star?!!

Well, we know that the sun is the center of the dynamics of our solar system - right! And the sun is 1 million times larger than the earth; the shear force of its presence holds the earth in place. This truth in and of itself is rich with symbolism for the life of a Christian, who seeks to make the way of Jesus of Nazareth the center of one's life. But did you also know that with each second, the sun transforms four million tons of itself into light?! Isn't that amazing!! (Before I go any further, I want to recommend a book to you, the book which really provided the inspiration for this sermon. It's called the "Hidden Heart of the Cosmos," by Brian Swimme). In it, Mr. Swimme explains some extraordinary scientific information, in very plain language. For example, each and every second, a huge chunk of the sun vanishes into radiant energy that soars out in all directions; never to return. It's gone. Some of this energy however is gathered up here on the earth, making life itself possible. So the sun, with every second, is giving 4 million tons of itself over to become energy that we, with every meal, partake of.

We so rarely think about this basic truth from biology and yet its spiritual significance is astonishing. The Sun converts itself into a flow of energy

that photosynthesis changes into plants that are eaten by animals, which are all eaten by - us!! So for 4 million years we've been feasting on the Sun's generosity; stored in the form of wheat, and corn, and milk and sweet potatoes, and turkey and ham and apple pie and even chocolate chip cookies!! Each day the sun dies as the sun and is reborn - resurrected - as the vitality of the earth - as you and me! We are able to burn brightly today, to breath today, only because the energy which makes this possible was burning brightly as the Sun only a month ago!! Now if this powerful connection, if this truth doesn't send some type of shivers up and down your spine, you better check your pulse! Every child needs to learn this simple truth: They are the energy of the Sun. And as adults, we should arrange things so that their faces shine with this same radiant joy - shouldn't we?!

Jesus said "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but have the light of life!" Just as the energy of the Sun is in each of us, making us who we are - so too, as Christians, Jesus is the One who makes us who we are. It's our Lord who gives us the energy we need. And if we burn brightly today, it's because of God's love which has been made known to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If we feel alive, free, loved, at home, at peace today - its' because of the new way opened up to us through our faith - through the church - through Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness.

All who follow Jesus are invited to let their faces, their entire lives shine with the radiant joy stemming from having Christ in their hearts: "You are the light of the world...let your light so shine before others, so that they will see your good works and give glory to your God in heaven." The parallels between the two sons are great - aren't they? But there's even more.

This is where it gets even better. The Sun's extravagant gift of energy can also be seen as a spectacular example of an underlying impulse which runs throughout the universe. This is so important I'm going to say it again. The sun's extravagant gift of energy can also be seen as a spectacular example of an underlying impulse which runs throughout the universe. Are you still with me? In the Sun - this impulse reveals itself in the amazing give away of energy which makes all life on this planet possible. But in the human heart, this impulse is felt as the urge to devote one's life to the well-being of the larger community! Jesus said "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are

my friends if you do what I command you." Jesus lived his life in a way that he was tapping into, giving full expression to, the basic impulse which runs throughout the universe - which keeps this planet alive.

Can you see where I'm going?! I was asked to give a stewardship sermon today - and I've got you singing Christmas carols and thinking about the sun. That's because stewardship isn't just about money! That way of thinking is far too small. Stewardship is about the fundamental principles upon which all creation rests. If through the ages various peoples and cultures have admired people who poured out their creative energies so that others might live - people like Jesus, St. Francis of Assisi, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Millard Fuller, Dorothy Day, Mother Teresa, your own mother or father maybe - if through the ages we've admired people who have poured out their creative energies so that others might live, we really were only intuitively recognizing that such humans were true to the nature of the energy that filled them. Jesus said "I have come, that they may have life, and have it more abundantly." Human generosity - our ability to be generous is possible - literally - only because at the very center of our solar system a magnificent "stellar" generosity pours forth free energy day and night, without stop, without complaint, without the slightest hesitation. This my friends is the way of the universe, the way of life and the way of Jesus! Jesus embodied this way of life dramatically and invites us to do the same. Not because bills need to be paid. Not because our average pledge is lower than the Conference's average. Not because our average pledge is lower than all other Methodist Congregations in this area. Not because our budget is growing faster than our pledging. But because when we give - when we live generously - we're being true to our very nature - the very pattern of life - the very DNA of the universe. We're living in harmony with all the creative forces of life when we free ourselves up to trust the goodness of God and live as generously as possible. When we make sure we think of others as well as ourselves; when we offer our time, our talents, our gifts, our money, our creative energy for the benefit and well-being of the larger community - whether our family, our church, our city, our world - we're following the way of life, the way of the Sun, the way of Jesus. And isn't that why we're here today? Because we seek to be one, with the creative, pervasive force of the universe?

I want to thank you all again for the important meeting we had two weeks ago; during the afternoon of that final Sunday in October when so

many of you came together to tell the story of Methodism in Arlington. As I sat there and listened - and looked at all those sheets of paper around us, so many of them representing difficult and painful times - I was struck by how this congregation, right now is at a very exciting time. I realized more deeply how much has been given, how much has been suffered, how much has been won! A lot of tears and struggle, hard work and faithfulness was necessary to get us to this point. Now it's time to build on this faithfulness and reap the benefits of your perseverance. God has plans for us, Calvary Church. So let's not shrink before this opportunity. Let's not retreat to the outdated, self-centered and narrow view that things revolve around us. Both science and religion have proven this view of the world to be wrong. Instead, let's share an even greater portion of what has already been lovingly, graciously given to us. Let's witness boldly to the fact that Jesus is the Lord of our lives. Let's keep the Sun at our center and celebrate - resonate - and demonstrate - the very pattern of the universe through our own living, our own generosity!! Oh Lord, let nothing hold us back - for we want to live - and you have revealed to us the secret. Sweep us away with the life-giving impulse of your holy spirit. Let us walk in the light and burn with the brilliance of your sun. Amen.