

City of Light
November 15 2015
Alida Ward

Friday night, after that wine and cheese party David's already mentioned, I was walking home from Marcia and Bill's –

walking, that is, from one parsonage to the other .

David hadn't lasted quite as long at the party as I had,
so it was just me wandering across Bronson Road under a starlit sky.

And I looked up at the steeple, as I always do.

If you've ever been here after dark, and most everyone has,
you know that after dark we light up the spire, and it's lovely.

So I gazed up on Friday night – but I have to confess, it wasn't just to admire its beauty

–

it was because I'm the one who changes the lightbulbs when they burn out.

The flood lights are positioned around the bell, and not everyone likes to climb the narrow ladders up the steeple to the bell, but I do.

So I'm always checking, because I kind of like having an excuse to go up – ooooh – northwest corner is burned out, gotta go climb.

But Friday night, every light was on, the steeple shone bright –

As bright, in truth, as I'd ever seen it.

DIdn't even need a flashlight – the church lit up the darkness.

Lit up the darkness.

It reminded of a night three years ago,

not quite one week after Hurricane Sandy,

when the power was still off, and everything around here was plunged into deep darkness.

And that night – it made no sense, but it happened –

that night the steeple lights came on.

Nothing else around was lit,

but the church suddenly was a beacon:

and it lit up the hill,

lit the darkness that had started to become overwhelming to us.

Miraculously, it seemed – inexplicably,

the church our only light.

The next day a crew of trucks all the way from Georgia came up Bronson Road to get to work on our power.

I went out to thank them,

and said “by the way, if you need to rest up in a place where you can make some coffee, for some reason the power’s on in my church, just my church.”

And the leader of the crew beamed at me and said,

“ma’am, that was us – we’re the ones who put the lights on in your church last night.”

“We’re the ones who put the lights on.”

I’ve thought about that over and over since then.

I’ve thought about how there could not have been, could not be any better reminder of what a church is supposed to be about,

what we are supposed to be about.

Those utility workers from Georgia, God bless them, made sure the church’s light was the first to shine in the darkness,

and then, almost as if there was a message I wasn’t supposed to miss, there they were for me to meet the next day,

there they were for me to hear them say

“we’re the ones who put the lights on, ma’am.”

Because, of course, isn’t that what we are supposed to be?

Now, when darkness falls again on a world meant for light,

aren’t we supposed to be the ones who put the lights on?

Aren’t we called to be the beacon of light?

Aren’t we called to be the ones who light up the darkness?

Last night, they dimmed the lights on the Eiffel Tower,

the City of Light was darkened in sorrow,

shadowed by grief.

But all over the city, its people gathered –

they were told not to, but they gathered –

carrying candles.

Lighting a night dimmed by mourning.

As we are called to do.

As we are meant to do.

To light up every place darkened by sorrow.

We are to be the ones who put the lights on.

Which means what?

It means to be the people who speak hope, who live hope, who proclaim hope.

Yesterday, a member of this church posted this on Facebook –

she wrote, “I don’t have any answers.

But I DO know that the people of Paris will unite and strengthen in their grief.

We tell our young people, to calm their fears,
that there are more good people than bad in this world.
I still believe in that.”

You know what? that’s what it means to speak hope,
to be one of the ones who put the lights on –
It is as simple as that, and as hard as that:
It is to be someone who speaks comfort, who voices promise,
who reminds us that in the darkness there are still so many stars that shine,
so many bearers of God’s light, so much goodness.

And there are chances every day, every day,
for us each to be someone who puts the lights on.
To answer despair with our own conviction
that this world, flawed as it is, is filled with the glory of God.
To believe that, to speak that, to enact that.
Every day there is a chance for us to be the ones who put the lights on.

Jesus said this to his followers, he said,
“you are the light of the world.
and you don’t hide that light where folks can’t see it.
you set it on a hill. you set it on a hill for all to see.”

We grieve today for the city of light.
And we remember our calling,
our calling – to be light, to be hope,
to shine bright on this hill,
to be, always, the first light in any darkness.
Amen.