

## Lights On!

So, it's been kind of a wild week in Fairfield, Connecticut.

Speaking just for myself,

I hadn't fully grasped how bad Storm Isaias was going to be.

I was puttering around in my office on Tuesday afternoon

when the winds began to howl and the shutters on the windows started banging

and then with a loud crack and a massive thud

a significant portion of the Linden tree outside the church house toppled past my window.

All over Fairfield, all of you were watching the same thing happen outside *your* windows.

It was scary stuff, right?

And then, of course, as I pointed out in my children's message,

the power went out -- and the darkness came,

along with the scramble to remember where we'd put the good lanterns,

and the slowly-dawning realization that there was no Netflix anymore.

Oh, the horror.

As one day without power turned into many days without power,

a lot of us were thinking back to the week after Storm Sandy,

8 years ago, the end of October in 2012.

That was a loooong dark chilly week.

And for me, thinking back actually brought to mind one of my favorite memories .

In the middle of that powerless week in 2012,

I'd decided, slightly crazily, to go ahead and have our youth group meeting anyway —

I told all the SPF kids to bring flashlights,

and we piled into the Barn, huddled together, and told spooky stories in the dark.

It was kind of awesome.

And after everyone had gone home that night, I'd come out of the Barn in the pitch blackness of a cold night, and improbably, astonishingly, I saw lights shining from the church steeple. Which made no sense.

There were no lights anywhere, no power anywhere around, but the steeple lights were shining.

And when I went over to the church, and opened the door, still incredulous,

I was enveloped by warmth and light.

And I walked back to my still-dark house with the glow from the steeple showing the way.

The next morning,

a crew of utility trucks from Georgia pulled up Bronson Road — Crews had come in from all up and down the East Coast after Sandy.

I went out to greet the guys. I thanked them for coming all this way.

And then I said, “by the way, I’m a pastor at that church there, and I just want to invite you to make yourself at home in there, put your feet up, have some coffee,

‘cause for some reason, I don’t know why, my church has power.”

And the leader of the crew grinned this great grin,

drew himself up a little straighter,

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 always loved that memory.

I've always loved those guys' pride in having made sure that before anything else on the hill,  
they made sure the steeple of this church was alight.  
I've loved remembering what they said:  
We're the ones who put the lights on.

Because actually, and profoundly, that's who we're all meant to be.  
The ones who put the lights on.

In my children's message, just a few minutes ago,  
I told the kids that spending this week lighting candles in the dark  
had made me think about why we call Jesus the light of the world.  
I said that when light shines in the darkness for us,  
we feel safer, we feel loved, we feel joy.  
All the things that Jesus' love offers to us, too:  
we are held by him, we are safe, we rejoice.  
And there's so much more that we could say, too:  
his light shows us the way,  
his light leads us on the darkest of journeys.  
For all those reasons, Jesus is the Light of the world,  
just like I reminded the kids.

But here's the thing.  
Jesus himself kind of that turned around.  
Jesus gathered his friends around him one day  
and said, "listen, listen, people.  
**You** are the light of the world. **You.**  
And your light is meant to shine, and to shine for all people.  
Let your light so shine before everyone else,  
he said, that they can see the goodness of what you do,  
and the goodness of God.  
You, you are the light of the world."

We're the ones who put the lights on, the Georgia man said to me,  
and that's it, that's what we're *all* called to be.

It's up to us to light up the darkness, Jesus said.

You are the ones who put the light on.

August of 2020 finds us all too keenly aware of the darkness,  
all too aware of the shadows.

There are too many reminders of what still divides us,  
we have seen again and again that though we are equal in God's eyes,  
we are not equally treated —  
the shadow of racism is over us,  
and we see it even in the inequality of those who are lost in this pandemic.

There is too much wrongdoing;  
there are too many people hurting and starving,  
and peace that remains too elusive.

In August 2020, the shadows are still very real,  
and the light is needed now more than ever, more than ever.

And we're the ones are called to put the lights on.

Who are called to light up the darkness, one candle at a time,  
to reflect Jesus' light, to be light to the world, as he was.

Which means what?

It means that we are to be the people who speak kindness,  
who live compassion,  
who proclaim justice,  
who embody hope.

To be one of the ones who put the lights on is as simple as that  
-- and as hard as that.

I'm not for a moment suggesting that it is easy.

Michelle Obama earlier this week startled people when she spoke candidly about feeling overwhelmed some days by the heaviness of all that is happening, and by having some days when she feels too low to do anything. There are days when all of us feel that way — days when it's hard to imagine putting the lights on for someone else when we feel like we're the ones in shadow.

On those days, we need first to open ourselves up to light, to be cared for, and then to care for others; to let ourselves be loved so that we can then love. And then we are ready. We are ready to put the lights on for others. To be the ones who speak comfort, who give voice to hope.

The season of Advent, in December, is a time when we most frequently talk about the light coming into the darkness — in our readings, in our hymns:

Arise Shine, for your light is coming, we sing.

And in Advent I often do a little devotion with youth groups, Confirmation Class.

I read them some of the scriptures you've heard already today, about Jesus being the Light of the world, about Jesus asking us to be the light of the world too.

And then I ask them to think about what it means to be light. I ask the kids to write down something they can do the very next day, to bring light into this world. Some way that they can help beat back the darkness. And they do. They write their ideas on bright yellow post-it notes that we put up on the wall in the shape of a candle. And the things they write are things like this:

“I’ll be a shoulder to cry on” someone who will write.

“I’ll speak up for someone being hurt,” someone else will say.

“I’ll be a friend to the lonely.”

I remember one of them writing “I will exude positivity.”

and another wrote simply I will “find the light in every darkness.”

Find the light in every darkness.

Be the light in every darkness.

Be the ones who put the lights on.

Each day, every day, gives us chances to be someone who puts the lights on.

To answer doubt 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.

“You are the light of the world,” Jesus said,

“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.”

That’s our calling — from this church on the hill

to shine bright, to be hope,

to be, always, the first light in any darkness.

To put the lights on.

To be the ones who put the lights on.

Amen.