

**"Recognize, Re-engage, Respond"**  
**(John 1:10-18)**  
**January 3, 2021**

Ontario has entered a new lockdown. COVID-19 pandemic is real and still around us. In the past, there were unpleasant events, like World War One and World War Two, and there's a possibility of having World War Three. However, COVID-19 is different. It's invisible, its presence is real, and its impact is enormous. We are all hoping that the cure can come sooner.

2020 is over. The celebrations for Christmas and the New Year were not like what we had before. In the past, the second Sunday after Christmas was a time of disappointment since it's the time the post-celebration fatigue sets in, families and visitors depart, people return to work and school. Life returns to the unwelcome "normal." At the beginning of 2021, we have to admit that the "normal" becomes a "new normal". It has become something we long for. A time of disappointment, as described before, has become a time of satisfaction we all miss.

How can we describe our present situation? "Darkness" might be an appropriate word. In the season of Advent, we were waiting and expecting the coming of Jesus. He did come and shined as Light in the darkness, and then he vanished. Did he leave us in the darkness then? Not quite. He has enlightened us to see and understand God's creation from a different angle, including the humanity that we all share.

"He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him." Jesus is the living Word of God, and was in the world. Why didn't people hear it? He is the Light of the world and was in the world. Why do we still see darkness? Well, it might have something to do with our assumptions and preconceptions. We might assume that the job of the Word of God is to provide us with answers. We might think that the Light of the world will simply enable us to see everything. But that's only partially true. When we hear 'one plus one equals two,' do you think we

shall all be satisfied? It's true, but why doesn't this mathematical expression please everyone, for good? Because the formula has expressed only one of the ways to understand the relationship between numbers. If we want to keep two unchanged, 'Three minus one also equals two.' If we want to keep one plus one unchanged, 'one plus one could equal three minus one.' When the Light shines into a dark room, that's only the beginning. It might be the beginning of a nightmare or of something else.

Darkness is not black; brightness is not white. Santa is not Jesus. Darkness expresses itself in different forms, in culture, in religion, in politics, and others. It's hard to recognize their existence if we don't look at them with a right pair of lenses. The same is with brightness.

"He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him." Is that a surprise? When Sarah demanded Abraham to send both Ishmael and Hagar away, I heard people said that Ishmael should be condemned because he was an important prophet and patriarch of Islam. Is it not something we heard all the time in families with multiple spouses? There's no need to bring it up to another level, to justify a struggle between religions. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were condemned not because the people living there allowed homosexuality but their violation of the sacred duty of hospitality that should be extended to even strangers.

When Jesus came to his own people, there was resistance to accept him because he was the Word that speaks, the Light that shines. He offered other pairs of lenses people could use. And those who dare to try the new ways would find it rewarding.

"To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." We are the children of God, because we speak what the Word speaks, and we shine what the Light shines. We recognize who we are, our imperfect nature. We learn to realize that we are all the same and it's all right! Jesus talked to women and prostitutes, welcome children, ate with sinners, called a tax-collector to be his disciple, mingled with untouchables, and did a lot more unacceptable things according to the

norms. We might ask why. Why must he be so controversial? The answer is simple. It's because of love. Jesus' presence among us shows that God loves the world, and its inhabitants. No one needs to be destroyed. Anyone can have a whole and lasting life. (John 3:16) We re-engage the world just as Jesus did.

How would you feel when a person is told by family members that the family can't show its love, and God too, just because of that person's religion, skin color, marital status, social status, declined well-being, gender, or sexual orientation? These prejudices destroy a lot of people from having a whole and lasting life. These are some examples of the darkness in this world. There are a lot of hidden corners in this world that need re-engagement, through the Light that shines and the Word that speaks.

Life is prone to change, and it will change, like the water in a stream that never stays. When we look inwards, we recognize our nature, our power of reasoning, as well as the limits of our knowledge. Are we dare to ask questions about the source of life that is beyond ourselves? Are we dare to question if the reasons that guide and direct our life should solely be self-centered? When we look outwards, we realize orders and patterns that we can identify with. What else can we do if we realize that our mind is not great enough to reach and comprehend the source of everything?

"No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." Religiosity is not a spiritual exercise that is mere speculation and intellectual activity. It's a love call, initiated by God, expecting a response.

A nurse who worked in a COVID-19 intensive care unit in Denver witnessed a gentleman who had a heart attack and was maxing out on life support. She contacted his daughter, who was unable to visit him because of the restrictions. The daughter asked to have all her Father's life-sustaining interventions withdrawn and let him die peacefully. The nurse offered to FaceTime with the daughter so that she could see her Father and say

goodbye to him. Without a sense of love, she probably wouldn't offer it. Why would one go the extra mile, which Jesus also encouraged? (Matt 5:41)

In New York, a security guard who had diabetes recently tested positive for COVID-19. He was so upset that he went out on the street with a gun and a military knife, decided to bait the police officers who arrived on the scene into shooting him. Cops fired a total of nine shots, and he ended up in a stable condition in the hospital. If he had other perspectives and didn't turn his anger against himself, that incident didn't need to happen.

Being alone in quarantine is not always a sad thing. It could be a good thing for some people. "Seize the opportunity" blogs are everywhere on the internet. There are online workout options, ambitious baking challenges, ok to watch Netflix nonstop, encouraging messages for getting fitter, smarter, and craftier. But what about someone with depressive tendencies or some other issues. There isn't one right way to navigate through this pandemic. Everyone has to pick what one feels right. However, people do feel wrong, choose wrong, with disastrous outcomes.

Feel the Father's heart through Jesus. Be merciful to us and others. We are all searching for our ways in the same labyrinth. Remind ourselves that God's love is the good news for everyone, every single soul, whether it feels happy or desperate. Recognize who we are, and re-engage with that source of love would enable us to respond positively to life, to God in entirely new ways. Amen.