

The Rev. Seth Dietrich
December 3, 2023 - Advent I

All Ages Sermon: Send Us Your Light

About a month ago I set off to hike up a small mountain with a friend in a far-away land called California. I was at a big meeting with other priests from all over the country and after the conference, I decided to spend 2 extra days there and explore Yosemite National Park. There was another priest from Minnesota and she had also tacked on 2 days, so we teamed up for one of the days. And we had heard that one really fun thing to do was to wait until the late afternoon and then climb up this small rocky peak called Sentinel Dome and watch the sunset. So we parked our car and we each had a small backpack with various stuff and we set out.

And it was only about a mile and half up to the top and sure enough it was just a spectacular view. You could see for miles and miles in every direction. You could see some very famous rocky mountain cliffs, like El Capitan. And half-dome. And we took a nap up there. And ate some snacks. I had a journal. So then the sun starts to go down and it was spectacular. Orange and red shining on this cliff so the cliff is bright gold, but there are also colors on all the mountains behind us, purple. And we are snapping all these pictures as the sun goes down further and further. The colors are fading but it is so peaceful.

Now at this point we notice all the other people at the top are leaving, and my friend and I think, "These people are fools. They don't know appreciate nature as much as we appreciate nature." So we stay around longer, taking our pictures. Finally, when we are almost the last people up there, we say, OK time to go. And we start to make our way back down. As we are going down the mountain there are way more trails than we remember. This was kind of a sinking feeling. I say, "Follow me. Well I take a left and then a right. And then we are kind of lost.

And then it hits us. We realize why everyone was leaving. It's getting dark. We're in the wilderness. And the moon has not been rising until like 10pm and it's only 8pm. Neither one of us brought a flashlight. And when it get dark it also get cold. The air is so dry there.

So we pull out our phones to see if Siri can help us. No coverage. Of course we do have this little flashlight on our phones. But it's weak and you can't see more than 4 feet and there are some spots on the trail with cliffs. And the friend I was with started to get really afraid. The dark and the cold and the being lost. Tension in her voice. Stopped talking.

And I'm praying underneath, "Get us on the path. Send us some light." And we were moving very slowly and carefully with one of our phone flashlights for 2 people to save batteries when off in the distance I see these 2 lights bobbing along. They were other hikers and we said, "Hello." And they called back hello and they came over and they had these big technical

headlamps on and we asked for their help and they helped us. One walked in front and one walked behind and they helped us get out of the dark and back down the mountain.

What season are we in? Nature has seasons and then the church has it's own set of seasons. We are in Advent. One of the things I like about this season the most is that we get to admit that in many ways we are lost in the dark, waiting for the light.

Our world is broken in many ways. People hungry. People who have no homes. Some people hate other people. We also just have sadness and confusion in our lives. Sometimes we don't know the way. Sometimes things feel really dark.

In Advent we wait for the Great Light, Jesus Christ. He is the Light of the World. He's coming at Christmas. And Advent is a time in which we prepare our hearts to open up a little more to that light. Stretching open our hearts to receive. Come Lord Jesus, send us your light. Lead us out of the dark.

You all know what these candles are? These often go in an Advent wreath. Ms. Bailey made these bundles of candles and this wonderful booklet. Talk to her if you need one.

On the first week of Advent how many candles do you light? First candle is the hope candle. What we'll do tonight is we'll turn out all the lights. So it is dark, dark, dark. And then we'll light just the one candle in the darkness. And we'll sing *O Come, O Come Emmanuel. O Come, Emmanuel*, God with us, Send us your light.

As we await the Great Light, we remember we already have some of that light. We can help as we wait and hope. We can give to those in need. We can practice kindness. We can be generous. We can give coats and boots. We wait for the Great Light to come into the darkness and we also shine our little Lights. We can sing *This Little Light of Mine*.

This prayer: O Lord, our God, thank you for not leaving us in darkness but for sending your light into the world instead. Help us to shine your light in the dark and dreary corners of the world. May your light and love radiate from us and give hope where it seems that all hope is lost. Help us to be yours as we wait for you to come again. We love you. Amen.