

Stained Glass Stories
“Light”
John 1:1-9
Eighth Sunday After Pentecost
August 4, 2019
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

John 1:1-9 (NRSV) The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being **4** in him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of all people. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. **8** He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. **9** The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.^[b]

Pastor Gene and I were on that river cruise a year ago. That’s where I found Modi’s name for the sweet puppy you’ve been so welcoming to...our church dog. While in Germany and Hungary, most of our daily excursions included visiting old churches, cathedrals.

We stood in dark Gothic churches and in bright renaissance cathedrals. We heard organ recitals that sent a feeling almost like electricity through me. And, we walked (and walked) past windows that made me marvel that they still existed! Some of these churches are O.L.D.!

In Nuremberg, our tour guide told us that the 2 and 3 story windows were taken apart pane by pane, documented and cataloged with a numbering system, then crated and hidden away in tunnels and basements and caves to keep them from being destroyed by the bombing of World War II.

We know, from too much analysis of war through centuries of time since Adam and Eve frankly, that enemies desire to destroy art and antiquities so that “time” (if you will) will be erased from their victims. Death of loved ones wasn’t enough. Destroy the things those people cherish as their heritage and history.

Thankfully, the citizens of Nuremberg’s efforts to save the panes of stained glass made is possible to reassemble the windows and put them back in their cathedral

to allow tourists, like Gene and me and thousands of others each year, see and be awed by them.

The evolution of stained glass started in ancient times. Egyptian colored glass have been discovered. Romans manufactured small glass objects. Stained glass gained recognition as a Christian art form about the time that Christians began to build church buildings. One of the oldest known examples of multiple pieces of colored glass used in a window were found at St. Paul's Monastery in Jarrow, England, founded in 686 A.D.

For the general population, including, through several centuries, folks like you and me, hard-working folks, weren't educated. They couldn't even read! So stained glass windows were commissioned to depict the stories of God from the Bible. In Europe, the windows were "Sunday School classes" for the illiterate.

Dr. Virginia Cheiffo Raguin, the author of several books about stained glass windows said, "You didn't have any large church without stained glass" in Europe. Décor wasn't just tapestry and frescos and carpets and gold-leaf anymore. People wanted their homes and their churches to have pictures, made of beautiful colors in the windows too.

Until the 16th century, stained glass was a primarily a Catholic art form. But, as I alluded to earlier, stained glass has been a target for destruction. When King Henry VIII broke away from the Church he also ordered the precious art form of stained glass be destroyed.

In the 19th century, stained glass made it to churches in the U.S. and was quite popular in the 1830's and '40s when Protestant congregations began to do what their Catholic cousins had been doing for centuries.

But what is it that beautiful stained glass windows need?

They need LIGHT.

And today's scripture reading, from the very beginning of John's gospel, talks about light...that Jesus IS the light.

How many of you have looked at OUR windows and agree with me that there are certain times of the day, certain times of the year that they are more stunning than other times?

Yes!

As beautiful as the windows are, they need LIGHT to be at their best.

I'm sure that artists and the artisans, of early guilds, who did the crafting of the artist's renderings, *knew* that their completed stained glass window wasn't going to be finished until LIGHT shown through it.

'Cause the main theme of stained glass windows is to showcase God's glory.

In Ezekiel in the O.T. and Revelation at the end of the Bible, there are descriptions of God and God's holy city as full of color and light. Coming into a church with stained glass windows is like coming into that Presence of God – with a sense of beauty and wonder and awe. The “Sunday School lessons” really are secondary – the main thing is to come to a sanctuary to worship God, to pray to God, and to bring God glory for all the things God has done for us.

Add the LIGHT that comes through the glass and we'll see not only the magnificent creation but also the flaws in the art that IS a stained glass window.

We're like that, too, like stained glass windows – and our “natural” light is our inner light. I guess that's natural, isn't it? Our inner light.

The Light is of our Creator. Because God the Creator knew that the **Creation** wasn't really finished until the Light shone through us...and we'd showcase God's glory!

John wrote, in his gospel: *“What has come into being in him was life and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”*

The Apostle Paul said that Christians *can* have the same glory.

Regretfully, it is not evident in all of us....but the Light of Christ, of Creation IS always available.

Jesus offers inner light to those who will accept him.

That's right, we have the CHOICE to accept or reject the Light – but when we do believe, it shines through us.

In a few weeks (Gretchen will tell you 35 days from today or ONLY 5 weeks away) we will open the doors of our little church for our special anniversary event. You all, I pray, are inviting others into this place and so that they will have the opportunity to see our stained glass windows. That's an easy thing to do.

What may be a little more challenging is whether or not YOU will be a "Sunday School lesson" for them, too.

Today – take a look at the upper left corner of the window behind me.

Above the circle with a flower inside (which is the Christmas Rose, a symbol of Jesus' birth; a flower that bloomed in Israel even in the dead of winter when he was born) is the Christmas star that lead the Wise Men to the Christ Child. The rays of light coming from the star are mirrored, if you will, with the upper RIGHT window. Those rays portray the power of God in Creation when God said, "*Let there be light; and there was light.*"

The rays in both windows reach down towards US.

And when we come to know Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are filled with what those rays represent: the inner Light of Christ.

Others will come into this place and see the stained glass depictions of Light.

What do they see when they look at us?

Is our inner Light shining through?

Clay Cross, a Christian musician, wrote a song called "Stained Glass."

The first verse is about a stained glass window found in the attic of an old church and the lyrics tell that "now that it has been taken from the light and discarded, it doesn't have any more worth than the frame."

In the second verse, Clay sings about how he picks the window up and holds it to the light and reveals its hidden and forgotten beauty and how it had originally been created to inspire others.

In some ways, we're like that attic-bound stained glass window. We're perfect creations of God, yet each of us are in various stages of our faith.

The final verse of the song goes:

*There's a stained glass window, in the soul of man,
A pattern of perfection, that was made with Holy hands
With the light of Heaven, pouring through each pane
Truth in all its splendor, is revealed and will remain.*

Dear Ones, we need to believe that we're just as God intended us to be: full of color, maybe a little sparkle, and with the purpose God has for each facet of our best "Sunday School lesson" who can lead others to know what we know about the grace of God. We're all called to live lives where the Creator can work through us; and the Light of Christ can shine through us.

We're in for an exciting 35 days of preparation to celebrate the legacy of PPUMC. May we shine Christ's Light...and leave a legacy for others to follow us in a life of faith.

Amen? Amen!