

## Many Lights Are Brighter-Together!

St. Mark Lutheran  
Two Advent services

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*For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. Romans 15:4-7*

Last week, we talked some about how many people prepare for Advent and Christmas. The custom in many homes is to go out into a tree farm, or into the woods, or visit a place that sells Christmas trees. After choosing a tree, you put it in a stand, position it just right, and then put on some lights to brighten the area and room in which it stands.

Stringing the lights and positioning them evenly is not as easy as it sounds. When you finally turn them on, you may notice you have too many at the top and too few at the bottom, or too few at the top and too many at the bottom. This can be solved easily enough by just buying more strings of lights. The more lights you buy, the brighter the tree is. A well-lit Christmas tree seems to bring a sort of joy to a darkened room and is so much better than a single light by itself. When you have hundreds of lights on a tree, its brilliant glow fills the room.

Last week also, we heard Paul speak of being prepared for Christ, the light of the world. In our text today, we read Paul's conclusions after dealing with various quarrels and differences among the Christians in Rome. There were those who believed they could eat anything, while others believed they could only eat vegetables. Some wanted to observe the Old Testament festivals, while others did not. Paul wrote to try and settle these disputes and have them welcome one another and focus on unity. Many lights are brighter-when they are together!

I was surprised recently when a friend that I have, who I thought was doing really well, told me that he is not doing well at all. He told me he has a lot of stress and worries in his life. I think he has a lot of company. Even in a good congregation like this one, as many of us grow older, there are worries and there is stress over the changes in our lives that are taking place. What keeps us going? It is the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. That's the same hope that Paul stressed for the Romans, which has lifted up God's people of yesterday and today, and will be there for his people tomorrow. It was first written throughout the Old Testament. So Paul writes in Romans 15, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." It's a sure hope, and that hope is in the person of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Without this hope, we are like lights strung together, hung on a tree, but disconnected from the source of power. When we look to ourselves as the main source of hope, we are headed for failure, because we are totally unplugged.

Without the hope we have in Christ, we are likely to become part of the "every man for himself" mentality that is so prevalent today. It's not exactly a new idea. On a dark night in the North Atlantic on April 15, 1912, the great ship named the *Titanic* was taking water and going down. What a contrast there was between different groups on the ship. The orchestra calmly played "Nearer, My God, to Thee" to help people focus on God and calm down. The orchestra itself faced almost certain death by allowing others to get in the lifeboats as they played. But it is very likely that many of them believed that right after they experienced death that they would be face-to-face with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile, there was another group on the ship, but they were acting much different. They were scrambling and pushing each other out of the way, desperate for one of the precious seats on the lifeboats. One man even disguised himself as a woman to be on the boats with the women and children who went first. Some tried to bribe their way to safety, not realizing their money was about worthless at the time. Me! Me! Me! It was all about Me!

Those of us who know the Lord, are the ones who have the hope. Those of us who appreciate the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross for our sins, have the hope in us. We have received this hope through God's Word, and we don't take it lightly. Remember what Jesus said in his sermon on the mount: "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." WE are the bright lights that God wants to shine this Christmas. We are not bright because of what we have done, but we are bright because of what Jesus has done. And the more we cooperate and stand together, the more we will accomplish, and the more light will be brought into a world filled with darkness. One little old candle does not attract that much attention does it?

As we look to God's Word for instruction, we find many good things there, but we also find countless examples of suffering and endurance. I sure am glad that God didn't have me trade places with Jeremiah. Jeremiah received criticism and opposition year after year. He was put through the physical persecution of beatings, imprisonment, and was even thrown into a muddy cistern. There's even more: he had to compete with false prophets who only preached what the people wanted to hear. Nevertheless, Jeremiah persevered and kept proclaiming God's truth.

In spite of all the persecution and rejection, Jeremiah was still able to write, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Jeremiah knew that if God is the source of your strength, you have enough help, even in the midst of strife and trouble.

So let us be God's bright lights this Christmas. By our words and by our deeds, let us shine forth and proclaim the real story and meaning of Christmas. God kept his promise by sending his own Son, Jesus. This light of the world came to save us, and to unite us with each other in His Church, for many lights are brighter-together! Amen.



