

“Here Comes the Son”

The Rev. Dr. Robert M. Zanicky

August 27, 2017

*First Presbyterian Church
Wilkes-Barre, PA
Matthew 6:25-34; 10:29-31*

Where were you Monday August 21, 2017? Will this date be burned into your mind? Will the event of that day be forever etched in your memory? (Probably not). I was with my wife Shawn, in Pleasant Valley, N.Y. sitting on her porch – waiting...for the sun to darken (at least a little).

We wanted to be part of those millions watching the sky, to experience a piece of the eclipse! But, in Pleasant Valley – it was not to be. No sense of any darkening, no temperature drop...But, it was a “pretty sunny day”!

Did you notice – some of the TV stations were “briefly” covering the event?! We did check in with our Rehoboth Beach, Delaware friend, who flew out to Missouri to experience “Totality” – He got it! The darkness came through! Me – Only light and beautiful sky! (Oh well!)

Well, at least the eclipse wasn't some foreboding, preliminary to catastrophe! Like the good old days of our human history. Think about it. You are living in pre-scientific times. The Sun comes up, it goes down – all is right with the world (at least with the Sun!), and then in the middle of the day – the sun is shrouded in darkness! What's going on? Is this the end? Trauma, fear, confusion! Not only found in the heart, but there with our eyes – in the heavens – the Sun is gone!!!

Our ancients, and not so ancients – in fear – cried out “What's happening? Why is this happening?”

In ancient China it was commonly held that solar eclipses occurred with a celestial dragon attacked and devoured the sun. Chinese eclipse records are some of the oldest in the world and go back more than 4,000 years; at least one simply states “the Sun has been eaten.” To frighten away the dragon and save the Sun, people would bang drums and make loud noises during and eclipse. Since the Sun always returned after this ruckus-making, it is easy to see how the tradition was perpetuated.

Ancient Hindu mythology provides a rather graphic and disturbing explanation for solar eclipses. According to legend, a cunning demon named Rahu sought to drink the nectar of the gods and thus attain immortality. Disguised as a woman, Rahu attempted to attend a banquet of the gods and was discovered by Vishnu. As punishment, the demon was promptly beheaded, and it is his decapitated head flying across the sky that darkens the Sun during an eclipse.

When the Spanish conquered the Aztec Empire in the 16th Century, among them was a Franciscan friar called Bernardino de Sahagún, now regarded as one of the first anthropologists. He provides a rare account of the reaction of the local people to a total solar eclipse.

“The Sun turned red, it became restless and troubled. It faltered. Then there were a tumult and a disorder. All were disquieted, unnerved, frightened. There was weeping. The common folk raised a cry, lifting their voices, shrieking. There was shouting everywhere. People of light complexion were slain as sacrifices. Captives were killed. All offered their blood. In all the temples, there was singing and chants. An uproar, there were

war cries. It was thus said, if this is complete, it will be dark forever. The demons of darkness will come down, and they will eat men.”

Again, we can be thankful that the magnificent working of nature – via a Solar Eclipse – can today bring millions together to celebrate, and stand in awe – with no fear or anxiety (unless you paid out \$8,000.00 for six people, and it was a cloudy day).

Of course because of what I do, and being a realist with optimistic tendencies – I thought about the creator of all this, and His Son - S O N – who entered the cosmos, this third planet from the sun – S U N – and has given us a Way to live our lives! As there is regularity in the SUN – we Christians believe in a God, through Christ who can be trusted to be with us in our journey through this life. Do not doubt there has been and remains much to fear, and be confused about in our lives, and the billions that have preceded us – but when it is dark...Here comes the SON!

Again – A Way, The Way of Life!

We, in today’s world have much to be concerned about, to be fearful about – from cultural decline, national division, to evil international players – that threaten all of us. And engagement is necessary – however interpreted. It’s our responsibility! But, fear, confusion are not to freeze us into inaction and despair! That is not the Christian Way! With freedom, come responsibility!

It may very well be that culturally we are in the throes of intense “fear”!

- Fear of where we are going
- Fear of the terror that besets us.
- Fear that we not have the tools (psychologically, morally) to hold on to who we are. Fear that we don’t deserve to hold on.
- Fear that there are not ultimate values to live and die for, but just tribal values, dependant on who has the biggest weapons of war.

I’m reminded of the Western intellectual of the mid-20th century, Jean Paul Sartre, “Life has no meaning, and values is nothing but the meaning that you choose.” Sartre could be the poster boy for this sickness of the West. This fear of the West.

Actualization without direction.

Recognizing the limits of human knowledge, recognizing that all cultures have their particularities, we must recognize some values transcend all cultures! The West must get beyond this existential fear, take from its intellectual, cultural, spiritual past and renew itself – once again declaring meaning! And a major part of this re-absorption, this restoration will come from the heart of Christianity! Of course, not a return to Christendom, but to a reorientation of the ever forward looking, energized, hope-filled Christian ethos!

Now, let me wax Biblical; Recall Matthew’s Gospel and the phrases of Jesus (as read this morning). What is being presented in these Biblical texts, of 2,000 years ago is a definite, thought out, and well defined way of life!

Hear this! A way of life!

Do you know what these early Christians were first called?

People of the Way!

- A way of life!
- How one frames one’s life!

- How you get out of bed each day, or better, why you continue to get out of bed each day, Hopefully! With Purpose!
- Your orientation for life!

Sartre dismissed this as prattle, illusion. There is no meaning other than what you, poor fear filled, creature can muster!

But, Jesus saw it 180 degrees differently!

- Because there is meaning
- Trust exists!
- Truth exists!

You, You, You, all of us need not live in fear!! Fear of nothingness, emptiness, worthlessness. There is a plan!

My friends, Jesus offers a way out of fear, that fear that exhausts the human spirit, that fear that eclipses the worth and integrity of the human soul. Trust is needed to get beyond fear. (Trust in something. Trust in someone!)

In Matthew 6, Jesus is in the midst of his “Sermon on the Mount.” He has been waxing eloquent; when he blurts out, “Let me tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and clothing?”

Jesus says, “Look at the birds, they do not worry about making a living, yet God takes care of them. And you are of greater value! Oh, and the lovely, beautiful lilies. They just exist, not working, and yet they exceed the glory of Solomon when he was on the top of his game. Listen – do not worry! Keep the fear level down, for God is with you!” Now Jesus is not describing the philosophy of economics, or the biology of birds. No. He is being a prophet, a poet, describing a way of life. And he is convinced, “You are in God’s hands! Come what may. You are in God’s hands!” So do not worry. Deal with fear, by understanding that the God of the universe actually cares for you! Allow nothing to eclipse, this Way!

Jesus continues his thought in Matthew 10. He’s saying, “Don’t let fear get you down.” Jesus is back to the birds, sparrows specifically. They are a dime a dozen; cheap; actually, two for a penny. Even a sparrow falling to the ground is not ignored by God! These sparrows like other birds, don’t worry or fear, so why should you? You are of so much more value!

This foundational declaration has permeated the Western World, although it is presently sidelined to say the least. You – you need to, in faith, get beyond your fears and follow Jesus’ way – into hope! For yourself and for our future!

Always remember and declare – Here Comes the SON!

Amen.