

*"I'm Watching the Sunrise"*

*Psalm 29; Genesis 1:1-5; Mark 1:4-11*

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Do you get the winter blues? I do.

The irony is that I generally like winter, including snow, and the outdoor activities that go with it. You need snow if you ski or snowshoe. I do both. And I still get the winter blues.

About 20 years ago I first learned about Seasonal Affective Disorder. (1) My "winter blues" now had a clinical name. Seasonal Affective Disorder, or "SAD," is a form of depression linked to decreased sunlight in winter in the northern hemisphere. Although I still get the winter blues, I do not get them as severely as when I was younger, which is one characteristic of SAD: severity decreases as we age. So there are blessings to aging after all!

But back to lack of sunlight and SAD. The lack of light this time of year can disrupt your internal body clock (your circadian rhythm), decrease serotonin (a brain chemical that affects mood) and decrease melatonin (which affects sleep patterns and mood).

This message is not a clinical presentation on SAD, so I will not detail the many treatment options, although the printed version of this message offers them through a link with the Mayo Clinic website. For the purpose of this sermon, however, one of several treatments is exposure to more and stronger light, including, for some, a device called a light box.

It will come as no surprise, then, that once December 21<sup>st</sup> arrives, I and many other people look forward to the increased sunlight of each day.

(1) [www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)

For over two weeks now we've been gaining light. Milford had 9 hours and 12 minutes of daylight on the Winter Solstice. In the 17 days since we've gained ten minutes, with today's daylight totaling 9 hours and 22 minutes. We're gaining about a minute a day now, and within two weeks we'll consistently be gaining two minutes of daylight per day. (2) Can spring be far behind? Um...well, maybe not.

This past Thursday, January 4<sup>th</sup>, the morning dawned—if a gray sky that never really got light can be called “dawn”—with the arrival of the forecasted snowstorm. Perhaps it was the gray of the day, but I remarked to Carol that morning: *“What is going on? The daylight started getting longer over two weeks ago, but it seems like it is as dark in the morning as ever.”*

In fact, it was darker. (3) You're never too old to stop learning, and that was the case that morning. Doing some research, I learned that although the amount of daylight becomes longer beginning December 21, the time of the sunrise actually continues to get later based on one's latitude on the earth. This varies from place to place, of course, so in Milford the later sunrise stopped that morning. Despite the snowstorm, the sun rose that morning at 7:17:54, one second earlier than the day before. So it will continue, rising earlier and earlier until June 13, when the cycle begins again.

So I've been looking all this time for light, for longer days of light, and for the earlier S-U-N rise. And there's nothing wrong with that.

But we should also be looking for the S-O-N rise! Today's Hebrew scriptures use creation and the natural world to call us to marvel at God's power in our midst. The reading from

(2) [www.aa.usno.navy.mil](http://www.aa.usno.navy.mil)

(3) [www.sunrise-sunset.org](http://www.sunrise-sunset.org)

Genesis reminds us that it was God who created. While science is essential to help us understand “how,” faith’s task is to help us understand “why.” These first five verses of Genesis remind us that creation happened when God **spoke**, and the first identifiable thing in creation was “light.” The first task of the “why” of creation was to bring light to the world. So, according to John’s Gospel, when the world needed a Savior it came through the **Word** – there’s God speaking again – and the Word “*was life, and the life was the **light** of all people.*” (John 1:4)

The Psalmist also emphasizes God’s speech. If the wind howled and the thunder snow boomed near your home last Thursday as it did mine, you gained new appreciation of the Psalmist’s imagery:

*“The voice of the Lord is over the waters;*

*the God of glory thunders...*

*the voice of the Lord is powerful;*

*the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.*

*The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars;*

*the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.*

*The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness...*

*The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forests bare; and in his temple all say, ‘Glory!’”*

**Psalm 29:3ab, 4-5, 8a, 9**

Now such Godly power has been sometimes used to frighten and intimidate, but that is not consistent with the God I have met in Jesus Christ. Certainly such power affirms God’s sovereignty. But sovereignty is not all there is to God. There is also love and blessing. We find this in Mark’s Gospel. It begins with John the baptizer proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins but it ends with Jesus’ baptism, blessed by a **voice** from heaven – there is God’s **speech** again – and the voice blessing Jesus, naming him Son and Beloved as God grants divine favor.

As we begin our new year, what Word do you need to hear from the Lord? What light needs to illumine your path? Are you seeking the light, not only the sunrise that increases melatonin and serotonin, but “*the Light (that) shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it*”? (John 1:5)

Christmas is officially over, I know, ending yesterday with the Feast of the Epiphany. But what if, in light of all the preparation that we put into Christmas, we lingered one final moment, like standing on Gulf Beach or Walnut Beach or Milford Point, watching a great sunrise? Could lingering in the light of Christmas help us be better Christians all year long?

In fact, maybe you have a memory of lingering in such light. I do. One of the best Christmases I remember was celebrated in late February. My older brother Bernie was in the Navy and couldn't get shore leave until then. My parents had perfectly preserved everything – the tree, the lights, the decorations – so that he could have Christmas at home. It was a live tree and I can still hear Mom saying, “Don't touch the tree!” But what a smile when my brother walked in the door!

Are you in the dark? Have you missed the joy and hope of the season just past? Has harried, hurried, hassle meant that you just went through the motions? Sit back. Watch the S-O-N rise, knowing that God continues to seek and save us, bestowing on us the baptismal blessing “You are my child, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” Thanks be to God!