

BISHOP'S NEWSLETTER

January 19, 2017

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.

[Isaiah 9:2 NRSV]

Dear people of God and sisters and brothers in Christ of the Northeastern Ohio Synod, We've been through some weird weather in the first month of the New Year. If you live in Northern Ohio, you come to expect weird weather. As I grow older, I understand why people go to Florida for the winter.

Weather affects our mood, which, in turn, affects our outlook on life. We tend to be crankier when we experience extremes of either heat or cold. It is more common, however, to suffer from bouts of depression in winter than in summer.

I confess that the bleak winter months get me down more than they probably should. I was diagnosed some years ago with a condition known as Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD for short. It is a mild form of depression accompanied by symptoms of sluggishness and irritability among others. It is manageable with artificial sunlamps and over-the-counter herbal medicines.

For me it is a challenge to maintain a positive outlook during the shorter days of reduced sunlight December through February. I long for the return of Daylight Savings Time. I rejoice at the arrival of the Winter Solstice (December 21) because I know that, even though it happens in the tiniest of increments, a minute or so each day, the days begin to get longer.

Weather not only affects our mood, but our faith as well. I find comfort in Scripture, but find myself challenged to do my daily reading. Oh, I do the necessary reading to prepare for sermons and worship, but there is more to reading the Bible than to accomplish a task.

Novelist and lay theologian C. S. Lewis, in his book, *Mere Christianity*, offers some advice to Christians, especially those new to faith. He writes:

The first step is to recognize the fact that your moods change. The next is to make sure that, if you have once accepted Christianity, then some of its main doctrines shall be deliberately held before your mind for some time every day. That is why daily prayers and religious reading and church-going are necessary parts of the Christian life. We have to be continually reminded of what we

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believe. Neither this belief nor any other will automatically remain alive in the mind. It must be fed.

Perhaps there is a nugget of advice in that paragraph for you. I was immediately drawn to the phrase about church-going. Though we tend to want to remain in isolation in the wintertime, neglecting the fellowship of being among others, especially our sisters and brothers in Christ, may add to our sadness.

You see, for me, worship is a very special time when human beings are brought very close to the glory of God. As we gather in the nave and face the altar we are in the presence of God, with the angels, archangels and all the company of heaven. Everything else that we do for the rest of the week flows from worship.

Worship, then, is a time to be with God, to adore and delight in the One who has loved us in Christ and is therefore to be loved. This ordinary Sunday activity is what makes the church so extraordinary in a society that has great deal of difficulty reflecting in depth on things other than itself.

We are in the season of light, the time after Epiphany. Jesus Christ is the source of the light for our world. This light is totally and completely a gift from God. We can't manufacture, invent or create this light for ourselves-and by this, I mean that all plans, programs and processes we might come up with to drive back the darkness and make ourselves and the world a better place are fatally flawed-without the light of Christ.

We need the light of Christ for our own sakes and for the sake of the world. As has been the case since sin entered into the world, humanity is living in dark times, and we need the One who brings light. Our problems and our fears – the troubles of the world are profound. But the light of Christ shines somehow in a more distinct and special way than it has before.

The very presence of God the Father, as revealed in His Son, Jesus, came into the world as a light into deep darkness. May we faithfully hold on to and bear witness to the light of Jesus Christ for our sakes and the sake of the world.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abraham D. Allende', written in a cursive style.

+Bishop Abraham D. Allende