

We'll Leave The Light on for You!

[Text - John1:1-5; 10-14]

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I imagine most Americans are familiar with the tag-line of Tom Bodett's Motel 6 radio ads: "At Motel 6, we'll leave the light on for you!" Even with today's energy conservation concerns, that's still a rather charming and comforting offer. Whether you're far from home, or *headed* for home on a dark and dreary night, it's always nice to be greeted by a warm and welcoming light. This morning, in light of our welcoming new members into this Church Home, I think it's fitting that we reflect on the image of *light*. First, we'll consider the Light of Jesus Christ; then we'll contemplate some of the ways you and I can continue to raise-up that Light in this community and throughout this world.

In the prologue of the Gospel of John, the author immediately establishes the persona and the purpose of Jesus, by utilizing the image of *light*. Jesus comes into this world to bring life and light to *all* people; and that life and light which Jesus brings cannot be overcome! When the stern and dreary leaders of Israel's religious establishment try to dampen and diminish Jesus' joyful ministry among the poor and downtrodden, Jesus simply continues to hug and bless their children, lift-up their spirits, encourage their faith, and brighten their worn and weary world. When faced with the stark bleakness of human hunger, sickness, and suffering Jesus responds by offering abundant food, and healing, and compassion. When he sees unenlightened prejudices and inexcusable injustices being perpetrated against the weak, the vulnerable and the outcast, Jesus passionately stands-up for them. And when he himself is threatened by the dark and deadly forces of fear, hatred, and violence, Jesus Christ shines-forth with an unquenchable Spirit of life and light, love and grace.

Jesus comes into this world to firmly embrace and fully embody an enlightened message of Divine compassion, welcome, and inclusion. Advent is an excellent time for you and me to celebrate that awesome

message, and to do what we can to make it shine throughout the world !There are certainly numerous ways in which you and I can do this. Like Jesus, we can stand-up for the poor and hungry and helpless, using our resources to feed and assist, encourage and uplift them. We can advocate for more peaceful and positive uses of our nation's vast resources - such as building hospitals overseas, rather than bombing them. We can speak-out against racism, bigotry and injustice, We can act as genuine children of our One Heavenly Parent, by treating *all* of our sisters and brothers with respect and kindness, welcome and acceptance. Today, you and I can authentically honor and serve Jesus Christ, by graciously caring for "the least of these, our sisters and brothers."

This afternoon, some of us will help prepare and serve a "Hunger Meal" for people gathering at Bethany UCC in Cleveland. Every Sunday you and I can bring-in food for our area Food Banks. Throughout these cold winter months we can put hats and scarves and gloves [and maybe even some mittens!] on our Mitten Tree; and blankets beneath it, to be distributed to those who truly need them. And this year our BUCC "Giving Tree" has ornaments with simple gift ideas for the students at Thomas Jefferson International Newcomer's Academy. This is the school where Vicki Szabo teaches and about 10 of our members regularly volunteer - providing educational opportunities and moral support to girls and boys who have recently arrived in the U.S.. I can't think of a better time than right now, for us to warmly welcome the newly-arrived strangers and sojourners. [That being said, we can always use more volunteers throughout the School Year! Just ask Vicki for the details.]

As a Church Family, you and I can provide help to those who are far from home, as well as those right here among us, for whom this holiday season can be a dark and dreary, or sad and lonely time. By joining our hearts and our hands as the Body of Christ, you and I can radiate Christ's Light and Love - in this place and far beyond. And the brighter that Light and Love shines-forth, the more it will attract others to join us.

When you think about what it was that attracted *you* to this Community of Faith, I imagine it wasn't just our marvelous Music Ministry; not even the my fiery and stimulating preaching! It was the friendly and sincere people - Open, caring, welcoming people! The kind of people who say to others who are searching or struggling "We'll leave the light on for you!" It's not because we've got it all together, it's because *together* we can help each other stay faithful and true to the Light and Love of Jesus Christ - a Light and Love which the darkness could not, and can not, overcome.