

THE DARKNESS FIGHTS BACK**John 1:1-14****(Read John 1:1-14)**

Intro: Out there, to the south, about halfway across our lawn to Dauch Drive, is a line of pine trees. I don't know if it was their purpose, but they partially conceal some power poles that bring the electric in from the street for this facility. The power company just recently trimmed those trees because they are just too tempting for squirrels. You see, if a squirrel does it just right, his carefree crossing of the electric line can very possibly be his last. I'm certain his little squirrel brain doesn't realize that if he jumps from the wire onto the pole he will be just fine. But, if he makes any kind of connection from the power cable to something that will complete a circuit, like the metal at the top of the pole, which is an easy squirrel length, he will become part of the transmission of electricity, at least for a split second, after that his lifeless body is airborne. It has always happened in the middle of the day, and it happens at least once every year, at least before the guys came and trimmed a month or two ago. When it does there is a loud noise that almost sounds like an explosion, and all power to this building is cut off. We have to make a quick call to the power company, and they come and push the breaker back into place out on the power pole on Mifflin Avenue and we are back in business.

I Googled it and confirmed what I already knew, like we humans, squirrels are mostly active during the day and shelter and sleep at night. I'm glad they aren't nocturnal because if they were, they might very well plunge this building into deep darkness with their antics right in the middle of prayer meeting or LifeGroups OR Christmas Eve service. Can you imagine if a squirrel decided it was time to do a high wire act and lost on Friday night? I can, right in the middle of Benjamin's reading from Isaiah – everything would have gone very dim, since the lights were relatively low because of the nature of the Christmas Eve Service, but it would gotten much darker really fast! We would have had the light of the advent wreath and the candles on our stable walls as our only light. We might have had to light our candles much sooner than we did.

We celebrate Christmas every year with lights in our windows and on our roofs and shrubs. We celebrate with candles and stars at the top of our trees and a Christmas Eve candle light service. It's a season of light for a lot of people. It is a bright and happy season in reality and in imagination. Even the seemingly never ending pandemic that has stubbornly plagued us for almost 2 years, does little to dampen the Christmas cheer that illuminates this wonderful season.

Two weeks ago we talked about light in the darkness. That was the first day we used our John 1 text and we focused on the portion of it that said *the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it*. John 1:5. But it still tries. The darkness fights back. Satan doesn't want to acknowledge he is defeated so he does all he can to plunge this world into the kind of darkness that would happen if a nighttime varmint tripped breaker here at our building.

Let's set something straight right now, even though the darkness fights back, it does not prevail. We need to remind ourselves of that because there is much darkness, and the temptation is to think its winning. One of the reasons for this is that being a Christ follower is not a picnic. We have it pretty easy here in North America, at least for now, but as we know, God's people in other parts of the world suffer greatly for their faithfulness. It's not easy being a Christian, and let it be known, it was never intended to be. We were never promised that. So, with that in mind, I want to finish out this series by looking at two martyr saints and show that we can be ready to be a light in the darkness rather than surrendering to it.

Our saint for today is King Wenceslas. The insert in your worship folder does a brief bio and description of him. That prompted my curiosity and I looked into him a bit further. I discovered that I had no idea who I was singing about when I sang *Good King Wenceslas looked out on the feast of Stephen*. (By the way, we might have used it this morning, but it's really not a worship song)

That Feast of Stephen referred to in the song is celebrated in some portions of Christianity on December 28th on Saint Stephen's Day. You might recognize Stephen as the first martyr of the Church recorded in Acts 6. As one of the first deacons he cared for the needs of widows and orphans as the growing church experienced growing pains. As a leader in that early church he was more visible and he was soon arrested for following and preaching about Jesus. In the end he was executed for his incredible faithfulness.

Beginning on the first Sunday of Advent, back on November 28th, and wrapping up today, we have briefly examined the lives of six saints of the church. We've learned a lot – especially considering we are not part of

a tradition that focuses much on the saints, at least in the way the Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, and others do. One thing we've learned as we read the inserts this month is that five of those six saints died for being a follower of Jesus Christ. Saint Andrew, Saint Lucia, Saint Ignatius, today's Wenceslas, and Saint Stephen, were all martyrs for the cause of Christ. They were faithful to the end and painfully aware of the fact that serving Jesus is not a walk in the park. This is because Satan refuses to accept his defeat and strives to bring his darkness to humanity.

Our text points out *The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.* John 1:9. John emphasizes that no matter how obvious it is, or how free the grace is, humanity turned their back on the light – *He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.* John 1:11. The darkness was and is blinding when you refuse to see the light.

Our saints fought against this darkness. Have you noticed that, with the possible exception of Andrew, who was known for bringing people to Jesus, every one of the other saints we've looked at, were known for caring for the poor, destitute, and abandoned. Even at great peril they set a great example as they took Jesus at his word when he taught *'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'* Matthew 25:40b.

Good King Wenceslas is the patron saint of the Czech state because he was just such a selfless man. He was actually a duke rather than a king (though he was given an honorary kingship after his death later by the Church). And he was known, as the legend goes, as a man who travelled around his region giving funds to widows and orphans and for caring for those in prison, and the sick. A biographer, writing a couple hundred years later would describe him, not as a king or even a duke, but as the "*Father of all the wretched.*" So the story that is told in the Christmas carol, written, by the way, in the 1850s, and doesn't mention Christmas, is still true, in the sense that it describes a man who took scripture seriously when it says *to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.* Micah 6:8b. Wenceslas overcame the darkness that surged against the people under his care.

He wasn't just known for his active compassion, he was also known for standing against the darkness of paganism. His mother was a pagan and she tried unsuccessfully to lure him away from following Jesus, but he prevailed and became duke at age eighteen and after a mere ten years he was murdered by his own brother, a pagan.

Standing against darkness is dangerous. We know that, having just spent six weeks in October and November learning from the persecuted church. But we have promises.

When the darkness fights back we know that:

We have the light and the darkness has not and will not overcome it. John 1:5. Let's keep the lights on ABC! We are not afraid of the dark because we have the light and we are the light.

When the darkness fights back:

We, like John the Baptist, a martyr, himself, and a *witness about the light, must bear witness about the light.* John 1:7-8. Oh yes – we know what happened to John the Baptist – he lost his head – literally – because he stood for truth and for the light. The darkness is dangerous, but we have the light.

When the darkness fights back:

We will see that some will follow after it – actually fighting the light – it might get ugly, since Satan doesn't fight fair. We know that some will reject the light – but we still need to fight the darkness. Jude tells us, *Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.* Jude 21-23. Don't give up just because of some darkness. We are the light, people need Jesus.

Conclusion: When the darkness fights back, we have the promise that as we hang on to the light we receive the right to become children of God, John 1:12. As children of God let's be light in the darkness. Amen.