

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

---

The Reverend David J. Powers  
Tuesday, December 24, 2024

---

John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Let us pray together.

We gather this evening to celebrate your word incarnate amongst us. So we pray that you might for us this evening enliven the words that we will hear, the scriptures that we have read indeed, but indeed this word which will be proclaimed. May it challenge us and comfort us. May it call us forth to shine light in every place. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

I love Christmas Eve at Idlewild. For some of you you've spent every Christmas Eve here. You were born into this church. You were baptized at that font there, and every December 24th you have gathered, perhaps when you were younger at the 3:00 service and you helped lead us as a child. Perhaps this has been your service. Perhaps as a young person you led us late into the evening as we rang in Christmas Day. Some of you are in this Sanctuary for the very first time this evening. We want you to know for those who have celebrated every Christmas Eve here and for those who celebrate their first, all of you are welcome in this place, and all of you are included in this lesson that we have just read from the Gospel according to John. Everyone is included in this story. This evening whether you feel most acquainted with light or with darkness, each of us...each of us has a role to play in the Word becoming flesh amongst us.

Not long ago I listened to an interview with David Wolf. David Wolf is an American astronaut. He's a doctor and electrical engineer. He's been to space four times. He says this,

“Darkness is an interesting theme in space, because there's nowhere where the contrast between light and dark is more extreme.” Dave has done dozens of spacewalks. He says that there have been times when he has just been sort of out there floating in space next to the craft. Maybe the ship tilts a little bit and a wing blocks light that's coming from the Sun or the Moon and it creates a shadow; and he says, “The darkness of that shadow is darker than any dark that you thought could be. Out there in space the shadow has no light in it. There's not reflected light from dust in the air, the earth around you, or the clouds; and you can reach into a shadow in space so deep, so

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

---

The Reverend David J. Powers  
Tuesday, December 24, 2024

---

dark that your arm can disappear right in front of your face. Your head can be out in the bright light, but your arm can be in the depth of that darkness.”

David tells a story of his first spacewalk in late 1997. He was on a Russian spacecraft. Perhaps some of y'all remember space station Mir. So Dave was up there. He was with two Russian cosmonauts, and he and one of his compatriots there, they were suited up and getting ready to make their first walk into space. I want you to imagine it. The door opens and they float out and they clip themselves—that's important, they tether themselves to the outside of the craft; and he and his friend Anatoli, they gently float to this work site. They have to do some repairs.

Dave says, “It was dark out, and dark up in space means you are on the night side of the Earth in the shadow of the Earth. There were no external lights on our spacecraft so it was really, really dark, and we had to have been over an ocean. And at night when you're over an ocean on the Earth, out in space that basically means that you don't see the Earth. You don't see it at all. When it's a moonless night, you don't see the Earth. In fact, all it might look like to you is the absence of stars,” the absence of light.

I want you to imagine this with me. Dave's up there in the darkness, and the Earth with all of us on it is somewhere far below him, but he can't see it. And all the while, and this is really important for what happens next, he is shooting through space. He is rocketing across the dark shadow of the Earth at five miles a second. That is 16 times the speed that we are moving right now because we are on the Earth. But he says at that moment he didn't feel any of that. It just felt like he was suspended in this cocoon of darkness gently floating, and he thought, “All right, no problem.” He actually said it was kind of peaceful to be in the dark, and it was just Dave and his partner and the spacecraft and the darkness and then suddenly this blaze of light blasts from below him. It was a sunrise. You know, because he and the ship were moving so quickly, that “the sunrise, which normally for us of course happens here on Earth very, very slowly and calmly, at the speed that they were traveling the Sun comes screaming across the Eastern edge of the Earth, straight across the Earth, lighting up everything in a second.” Dave says, “So the Earth lights up below me, and suddenly I can look down 200 miles and see that we are moving at 5 miles per second. Oceans swoosh, deserts swoosh, clouds swoosh, and all I can think is ‘ah,’ and I clung to these handrails white knuckled in my space suit gloves, because I suddenly had this enormous sense in that darkness and in that new light of the height and speed that we were traveling.” He says. “It was sort of like you're standing comfortably on the ground and someone flips on a switch, and suddenly you realize that actually you're not on the ground, you're on a 400,000 foot stepladder.” But he said, “The colors there, what you're seeing on the Earth is so spectacular, the greens and the blues and the delicate pastel like colors, the contrast and the brights are just...they're just like nothing you've ever seen.” And so Dave and his Russian buddy, they're out there for hours doing repairs on that ship, and so they are, because of the speed that they are traveling, they're going in and out, in and out of these days and nights. So it's a 90 minute—just so y'all know, it's a 90 minute light dark cycle. So you have 16 nights and days for every Earth day, which means as they're working outside that spacecraft, this change, this deep darkness and then this bright shining light, it's happening to them over and over and over again.

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

---

The Reverend David J. Powers  
Tuesday, December 24, 2024

---

Every 45 minutes they go from “blazing light to quiet darkness, from blazing light to quiet darkness.” Dave says it is not difficult to get lost.

(Significant portions above were drawn from an interview of David Wolf conducted by Jad Abumrad in 2012 for the podcast show Radiolab.)

I thought about that story this week, reflecting on the beautiful imagery of the Gospel according to John, this imagery of light and dark. This evening, perhaps you know what it feels like to be in the shadow of the wing or even of the Earth. Perhaps you are navigating a darkness that no one around you can fully understand. Or this evening perhaps you have had light shining on you in this season that has startled you and brought you joy even if it's a little scary. This evening whether you feel most acquainted with light or darkness, each of us has a part to play in the word becoming flesh, because when we look to find the light that God offers, that the gospel promises that God offers, we must remember that that light on this night, we are reminded that light in the Christian story is not a thing but a person. The light is Jesus. He is the light of the world. He is the light shining in the darkness. Jesus is that which cannot be overwhelmed by that darkness. The key to receiving this good news of great joy for all the people is being grounded in the reality that indeed Jesus is with us. God with us. We've already sung of it, and we'll sing of it again. Emmanuel—it means God with us. The key to understanding the power of the light that is Christ is to remember the ‘With Us God’ that we gather around tonight. So that for us enjoying the light that Jesus brings is ultimately about appreciating his presence, his ‘with us,’ about leaning into a practice that reminds us of the presence of Christ. So to you who are living in darkness, whether it be the darkness of addiction or depression, of divorce or of losing a parent, to you who find yourselves this evening living in the darkness of getting wait listed at your dream school or the end of a relationship, to you who are navigating the darkness of a job that has been lost, the loneliness that feels ever more present in this holiday season, to you there is a message in the Gospel of John that what has come into being in Jesus was life. The life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. Whatever the darkness you find yourself in, the shadow that you are cast in now, there is a light in the person of Jesus Christ who will shine brightly in the midst of it and not be overwhelmed by it.

But perhaps this evening you have come more acquainted with light. You've made your way home. There's deep joy with the people you are gathering with. For those of you who are most well acquainted with light this evening, of new love or of old friends, of reaching a milestone or a dream realized, of a new baby or an acceptance letter, to you who know light in this season, you have a calling too. You have a calling that the gospel writer is clear about. He came as a witness, John did, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. John himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The True Light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world. The Gospel of John speaks of a prophet who looks upon a dark world and says light is on the way. It is breaking in even now. It will rush upon you, and you won't even realize it. You won't recognize it, but light is coming. So for you who are acquainted with that light this evening, it is your calling to speak and proclaim it not only in the world but also in your

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

---

The Reverend David J. Powers  
Tuesday, December 24, 2024

---

relationships, not only here at church but also out in the world. When we cling to the promise of this night, when we trust that in the darkness there will be light, and in the light there is good news to share, that is indeed how we participate in the word becoming flesh, how we participate in that word dwelling among us.

So may the word of God that we know in Christ become flesh amongst us this evening. May it live among us, full of grace and full of truth.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Mother of us all. Amen