

# Bringing Light into a Darkened World

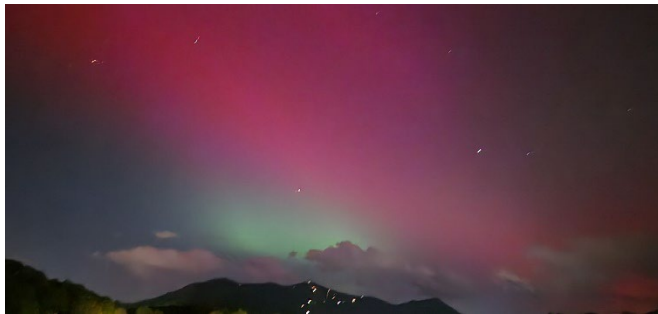
## Session #1: From the Beginning

WNCC UWF Retreat, Harrell Center, Lake Junaluska, NC  
June 13, 2024, 7 PM

### **Genesis 1:1-5**

**CEB**

<sup>1</sup> When God began to create the heavens and the earth—<sup>2</sup> the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God’s wind swept over the waters—<sup>3</sup> God said, “Let there be light.” And so light appeared. <sup>4</sup> God saw how good the light was. God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God named the light Day and the darkness Night. There was evening and there was morning: the first day.



Last month, an amazing thing happened in the skies over much of the Southeastern United States including North Carolina. We were



given the opportunity to witness the aurora borealis that resulted from unusual solar flare activity. Did any of you get the chance to see these amazing colored lights in the night skies? We had cloudy skies in my neighborhood and I hate I missed this awesome sight. The wide picture on the screen is one taken right here at Lake Junaluska and the other was taken on the



Outer Banks. Amazing, right? I hope you remember the other amazing experience that happened in April when a total eclipse occurred over the United States. While we didn't have a total eclipse where I live, my daughter and I were still able to observe the disconcerting experience of light disappearing during the middle of the afternoon. Did any of you have

the opportunity to experience the eclipse? Did you find it disconcerting as well? **[black screen]**

While these incredible occurrences are remarkable, we often take for granted the basic gift of light given to us each day as the sun rises and most nights when the moon and stars light the skies. Light, my friends, truly is a gift—a gift of God's good creation. As we heard in the Scripture reading for this evening, **“When God began to create the heavens and the earth—the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea...”** [Gen. 1:1-2, CEB.] The deep darkness in which and over which God worked in creation provides a dramatic contrast for the initial creative act of God:

illumination. **“God said, ‘Let there be light.’ And so light appeared.”** [Gen. 1:3, CEB.] “Called forth by God's command, light bursts into being and enables the possible perception of all other elements of

creation. In the dark void, even chaos could not be perceived. Light is the first step for order to be established and discerned.<sup>1</sup> My theology professor at Duke, Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright, explained this light without source as “immanent” meaning “of God.” “By separating light from darkness and by naming the light ‘Day’ and the darkness ‘Night,’ God establishes the origin of time and divine dominion over history as well as nature. [This immanent light] is the palate for further creation. Yet light itself renders more than the possible perception of shapes and colors. Light is the basis of life and order and light itself is judged by God as being good thus exhibiting its moral quality. . . .The separation of light from darkness begins a crescendo of creative action that is crowned with the creation of humans.”<sup>2</sup> God formed us, humankind, in God’s image so that we might serve as God’s companions. And, following God’s declaration that light and all of Creation is good, we are to be stewards of God’s good creation continuing the ordering of nature and society. The early Israelites testified through the Psalms their belief that light was “a symbol of life and salvation and characteristic of the presence of God; [it was]

---

<sup>1</sup> Joseph L. Price, “Genesis1:1-5: Theological Perspective” in *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 1*, eds. David L. Bartlett \* Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) 220.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

fundamental to the creation, pushing back the darkness and making [all] life possible. [To them,] every morning was a kind of new creation.”<sup>3</sup>

In Psalm 27, the Psalmist declares, **“The Lord is my light and my salvation. Should I fear anyone?”** [Psalm 27:1, CEB.] The Psalmist’s affirmation gives us this example of faith for each morning, for each new creation, even when we find ourselves in a darkened world. I could recite a litany of examples where darkness seeks to cast shadows over our lives and I am sure you can too. But we know that even when we walk through the darkest shadows in the deepest valleys, God is with us! When God spoke the light into existence, and the sky, the seas, the plants, the sun, the moon, the stars, the birds, the sea creatures, the land creatures, and humankind, all of Creation was immanent; it was of God. All that exists depends upon the creative and sustaining power of God. That power is within each one of us—the power of God’s Holy Spirit equipping and sustaining us to be good stewards of God’s Good Creation.

---

<sup>3</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, “The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. 1*, ed. Leander Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994) 343.

Sadly, many people today do not even know that they are of God and have that spark within them. They cannot recognize God's Prevenient Grace tugging on their souls to awaken them to the love of God. They are allowing the shadows of darkness to overwhelm them and lead them towards the next shiny object mistaking it for the true light. Some have been so overcome by fear that they have given-up and retreated into isolation. Others have been triggered into fight mode where everything is "my way or else." These people are hurting and in their pain, they are hurting others. Where will they find a shepherd to lead them through the darkness of their valleys? Where will they find Light-bearers—those whose own flames can kindle relationships so that real conversations can take place—real conversations that can lead to sharing the true light of God?

Sadly, even some of us have allowed fear to dampen the spark of the Holy Spirit within us. We may have forgotten how to kindle that spark and only go through the motions. But, the good news is that we are here—we have gathered in this place to renew our spirits and be lifted back up onto the path of discipleship through the power of God's Sanctifying Grace. I pray that as we breathe deeply of the rarefied air of Lake Junaluska each one of us may feel the Holy Spirit touching us with each inhalation. I

pray that as we bask in the light of God’s good creation, we will feel the burning power of God within our hearts and souls. And, I pray that each one of us will discern where God is calling us to grow in our faith even as God empowers us to grow in our capacity to be a “Light-bearer” to a darkened world. May it be so. Amen.

