The clocks have changed, reminding us all, (annoyingly at about 4PM!) that daylight hours are decreasing in our hemisphere and the hours of darkness are increasing. As with Halloween observances, cultures have long associated the darkness of night with the greater opportunity for mischief, danger, and evil. Some of this is just logically true: the dangers of driving at night, the difficulty of seeing at night, crooks hiding in the shadows in order to steal or hurt at … darkness is often associated with trouble, even evil.

The Bible is no exception… Psalm 23: Yea though I walk through the darkest valleys, I will fear no evil…. Paul is always talking about the works of darkness, versus the works of light, and saying as followers of Jesus, we are to be known as children of light. Every Christmas we read the beginning of the Gospel of John, that the Word, the Spirit of Christ, was coming into the world as Light, and that darkness cannot put it out. Yes, Light One Candle, and it can lighten a whole dark room.

As you may know, when I went to the progressive music convention, I had at the privilege of hearing some great speakers. Let me share with you some reflections by Rev. Otis Moss III, one of the nations best preachers, now at Trinity Church, a large black UCC church in Chicago. One of his books is entitled “Dancing in the Darkness.” He chose the title because of experiences he has had in the midst of racial turmoil in Chicago. In short, he and his church had received threats of violence partly due to the campaign of then Senator Obama who was a member of his church, and partly due to the fiery prophetic sermons of Moss’ predecessor, Dr. Jeremiah Wright. He awoke in the middle of the night to sounds in his house; Suspecting a harmful intruder, Rev. Moss grabbed a baseball bat and began to search the house room by room. In time, he discovered that the sounds were coming from his daughter’s room. He entered it bravely …only to discover that not being able to sleep, she was enthusiastically practicing her ballet moves! Yes, hostilities and fear

everywhere in the city, but the spirit of his child taught him: We can still do things that give us joy, we can still sing or dance… hence the title of his book: Dancing in the Darkness!

From the Gospels we hear that LOVE casts out fear. There has been plenty of fear and fear-mongering in our country… Think: homophobia, Transphobia, Islamophobia, and perhaps there should be a new word, Immigrant-phobia! We know it is basically fear of what is different, fear of the unknown; so much of it is imagined or irrational fear! I don't know how many times I have heard echoes of what President Trump said many years ago, that immigrants from Mexico are nothing but "Bad-Hombres!" Continual echoes talk about the immigrants being violent criminals. But my question is always, what percentage of people crossing the Rio Grande do we have to run from in fear? The Mexicans I know are hard-working people who roof our houses, landscape our lawns, work on farms, stock our shelves in supermarkets, own and run great restaurants, and yes, some Latin Americans have made it to the halls of Congress!

But what of the fears that are based in reality, people that cause us to carry a baseball bat with reason?… (Of course many people to fear currently work for our government, especially those who wear masks and break downs doors without a warrant). There are many people to fear in military, totalitarian, authoritarian governments. Remember the famous story of Desmond Tutu in Apartheid South Africa? The government police came into a church where he was preaching and lined the side walls, a show of intimidation, hoping to catch Tutu in some word of treason. Remember what Tutu said to them? ("*You are powerful, but you are not gods, and I serve a God who cannot be mocked. So, since you have already lost, I invite you to come and join the winning side!")*

There is a similar story from Rev. Otis Moss III… regarding another incident meant to intimidate… (It was back in the time of the rise of Obama)… There were intimidation tactics, really based in fear

of the power of black preaching and truth-telling. The (presumably white) “Westboro Baptist Church”was shouting and chanting that places like Trinity Church were the source of the downfall and destruction of America. Rev. Moss says:

The Westboro people were carrying signs and shouting racist insults through megaphones. Their provocative tactics were designed to get us to react, to reinforce a story that says we are naturally violent, that we are like animals. Our spiritual home was under assault. I was horrified. Sometimes the monsters you feel ARE real.

As they waved their hideous signs and screamed their hateful slogans, the Holy Spirit dropped an imaginative flash of inspiration on me. I gathered the Choir together and said: This is what I need for you to do: Muster up the kind of faith our ancestors had. We are going to march outside and surround the protesters… but we are not going to touch them, we are going to sing to the glory of God so loudly that our voices, the voices of love, are going to drown out the shouts of hate.

*They went out, 100 strong, and got right up in the faces of the Westboro people singing “This little light of mine.” Try to imagine a 68-year-old grandmother, all of 5 foot four, getting in the face of a menacing, stout 6-3 man, clapping and singing, with all her power. That man almost fell into the street, because the power of the song made him lose his balance. And four elderly women surrounding the megaphone man; He couldn't get a word out. They just kept singing and clapping (on the 2nd and 4th beat!). They were fighting hate and fear with a song of spiritual power. It was beautiful. I saw the loving sound waves of gospel music wrestling the sound waves of hate. The Deacons joined hands and began to surround the protesters with Pentecostal prayer – prayer deep from the soul. (*I imagine it like this: “O Lord, you say to love all, you say don't insult. I am doing my best, but I feel some hate here. Oh Lord, show me how to love my neighbor, every neighbor, especially these brothers and sisters,

following you but saying mean things without even knowing us.) *The atmosphere changed. We had won ourselves a measure of peace, something we could not have achieved by force or by calling the police. The protesters were overwhelmed by something they were not used to: the spirit of God's Love. Looking half drunk, they climbed clumsily into their vans, and drove away.*

This story of what happened at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago is a testimony of Amazing Grace, the real power of truth and love. Light is a great symbol for God, since it indicates Truth (as in "we will shed some light on this matter"). We recall that Jesus once said that nothing can remain in darkness, in hiding, in secret, but that everything eventually comes to the light. Light is truth. Light is reality. Light helps us to see clearly. Psalm 27 refers to God as Light: "The Lord is my Light and my Salvation!" John refers to the pre-existent Christ as the Light that came into the world and shines in the darkness. And Jesus also refers to himself as The Light and asks his disciples to "walk in this light." As current day followers of Christ, we need to persistently seek truth, to work for justice in our world, and the highest ideals of love: create harmony among diverse people, praying that "God's will to be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Amen.

Closing song:

This little Light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
Darkness has no power here, I'm gonna let it shine.
Let it shine all through the night, I'm gonna let it shine.
Light of Love, it conquers fear, I'm gonna let it shine.
Light of Love, it casts out hate, I'm gonna let it shine.
Light of Christ, it wins with love, we're gonna let it shine.