

Don't Stop Believing
December 27, 2020
The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry
John 1:1-14
The Light Shines in the Darkness

There is a story told about the 19th century British author, Robert Louis Stevenson when he was just a boy living in Edinburgh, Scotland. You may remember Stevenson as the author of Treasure Island, Kidnapped, and The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

One night, his nanny was having a difficult time getting him to settle down and go to sleep; Robert just kept looking out his bedroom window, completely oblivious to her pleas. Eventually she asks him, "What in heaven's name are looking at out there?" She pulled back the curtain so she too could see out the window. She realized he was watching the lamplighter making his way down the street, lighting one gas street light after another. She looked at him quizzically and he replied, "Look at that man, he's punching holes in the darkness."

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1: 4-5)
Important words in the opening chapter of John's Gospel.

It's a tough time. Even in the midst of the hope and promise of Christmas, it is a hard, bleak, dark time; A time when it is very difficult to see a way forward.

I was talking to one of our clergy colleagues yesterday, someone who had yet another one of her matriarchs and patriarchs die. She said, "Nine people, Bonnie, we've lost nine people this year, it's just devastating us, we are all so sad and these Zoom memorial services, O my god, they just aren't cutting it."

Friends we have one task these days. A task that takes precedence over all the others, a task we will need help with, from each other, in order to achieve it. Our task in the midst of this hard, dark COVID-ridden time is, "Don't Stop Believing." Don't stop believing.

It's more than a song, for me it is a theology.

When Steve Perry wrote, the song Don't Stop Believing, for his band, Journey, he wrote it when he was playing a lot a gigs and venues here in Detroit. He was having a hard time sleeping so he found himself, at all hours of the night, looking down onto the boulevards, where all he could see were shadows of people standing in the street: waiting, and pacing. "Strangers waiting, up and down the boulevard, their shadows searching in the night..." then suddenly one of them would walk under the streetlamps and then they would become real people, visible. Moving from the dark of the night, to the bright of the street lights. That's where lines of the song come from,

Strangers waiting
 Up and down the boulevard
 Their shadows searching in the night

Don't stop believing
 Hold on to the feelin'
 Streetlight, people
 Don't stop believin'
 Hold on to the feelin'
 Streetlight, people

Now more than ever we need to be streetlight people, moving toward the lights punching holes in the dark, believing that together we can prevail, together we can be people of faith. Not blind faith that says, "God has plan," not insipid faith that says "It will be ok," not sappy faith that says, "They are in a better place."

But a streetlight faith, faith that sees a bit of hope glowing, shining, that draws us out from the cold shadows of our doubts and pushes us to risk believing. Though some of us may falter, others will just drag us along into the spotlight of God's hope.

What am I talking about, streetlight faith in the real world?

I'm talking about this past April and May more than 1 M Michiganders are out of work, short of food, we, all of us in Episcopal Diocese of Michigan raised, more than \$220,000 to help feed our neighbors in South Central and South Eastern part of our state.

I'm talking about people staying home and isolated, to stay safe, but then when one of our seniors, in our faith communities reaches a milestone birthday, and cars, driven by people from that person's congregation, drive by and honk and wave and pray, bringing birthday wishes like no other.

Or, an 80 year old parishioner from East Lansing, hears the call for more PPE. She is a devoted, some might even say an obsessed quilter, and so since March she has sewn more than 1900 face masks and given every single one of them away for free. She says she hasn't even needed to buy any of the material, 'cause she's kind of a fabric magnet. She is using her gifts, her streetlight faith to punch a whopping hole in the darkness of our country not having enough personal protective equipment to fight this virus.

Streetlight people, punching holes in the darkness, for ourselves, for each other, for our neighbors, and for those we have yet to meet, bit-by-bit, moment-by-moment.

Please, embrace the hard won gritty faith that pulls all of us out from the deep shadows of doubt and darkness, to the profound light of possibility and hope. Don't, Don't stop believing.

“In him was life and the life was the light to all people.” The light continues to shine in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. Then or now.