



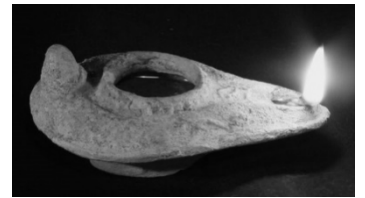
Dear Friends in Christ,

For several summers when I was growing up, my father would join an archaeological expedition to the Holy Land, Caesarea to be exact. For six weeks, he would dig through the dirt of ancient homes, roads, and towns, looking for artifacts and some sense of the world that people lived in so many years ago.

Volunteers were assigned to different archaeological groups who were sent to different sites or “digs”. One group found a beautiful mosaic which led to the discovery of a seaside villa. They were the envy of the other groups; one who had found a rather boring wall, and another who found an even more boring road - Still significant discoveries, but not nearly as exciting as a villa full of colorful mosaics.

It was a common occurrence, as the dirt was gathered and sifted, to find small pieces of pottery, broken ancient glass, and pot handles. And invariably even the most novice archaeologist would find large pieces of oil lamps or the lucky find of a lamp that was entirely intact.

Oil lamps and their pieces were common as they were a staple for any ancient household just as a flashlight is today. Every home had lamps readily available for any member of the family that needed to walk a small distance in the dark. The small clay lamp fit easily in the palm of the hand, with a small bowl to hold the oil and a smaller opening at one end to hold the wick for burning. And this hand-held lamp would give off just enough light for the person holding it to take one more step. The light from this small clay bowl would not illuminate the whole path. But it would ensure that your next step would be safe as you would be able to see any immediate hazards, holes, uneven ground, or danger.



In Psalm 119:105, we read, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” Through the open tomb of Easter, a believer in Christ will hear Jesus in these ancient words.

In December of 2019, I wrote a letter to NGLS congregations on the eve of 2020, declaring that our theme for the coming year was “Be Thou My Vision, 2020.” I shared that “the Word of God, that is, the word made flesh in Jesus, is the light that will show us our next steps, one step at a time. We will not, cannot, see the entirety of our future. But digging into the life of Christ in study, prayer, conversation, and worship will most certainly shine a light.”

At the time, I had no idea just how much this would prove true for the year 2020. It is more than a little ironic, that a year that is synonymous with perfect vision would be so severely lacking in it. In this time of pandemic, we cannot even see to next week, much less next month or further down the road. Our sight is very much limited to the here and now. We have what we need for the next step, not the whole journey.

We have suddenly become very present minded. Life has been boiled down to this day (and what day is it anyway?) or at the most, this week. The things I had been looking forward to and planning for have either been cancelled or postponed. Even events scheduled for September and October are subject to change. I didn’t realize how much looking forward to things actually pulls a person forward. The rhythms of each day seem to lack momentum or a gathering sense of purpose. And yet, if we saw what the next weeks and months will bring, would it be too much? Aren’t today’s troubles enough for today?

As the year 2020 continues in all its foggy blurriness, there is blessing in only considering the path that is directly beneath your feet. I invite you to take this slow motion marathon one small step at a time. Let love, patience, and compassion be your guide. We are moving forward, and slowly, slowly, the hazy future will come into focus until the now is in hindsight, and we will see clearly that God has been with us all along.

Be well.

Bishop Katherine Finegan