
Light and Predicting the Future

A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
Observing Candlemas, the Feast of the Presentation – Year B

It is time, once again, to predict the future! Yes, mysteriously, in shadow and wonder, we gather in this holy place. Maybe we don't always realize it, but we are gathered in order to predict the future. We gather in prayer, to predict the future.

Have you heard the old saying about the best way to predict the future? Some people wrongly attribute the saying to Abraham Lincoln. Others have said it. Peter Drucker sure said it a few years ago. Do you know how to predict the future? The best way to predict the future is to create it. The best way to predict the future is to create it.

Meanwhile, our earth spins regularly around the sun. Happy Cross Quarter Day to you!

Maybe we've heard of the Winter Solstice, when the days in the northern hemisphere are at their shortest, and the nights are the longest. Maybe we've heard of the Summer Solstice, when the days are at their longest. Maybe we've heard of the Spring and Fall Equinoxes, when our days and nights are the same lengths.

But this week brings us another calendar phenomenon, one of the four so-called "cross quarter" days, the midpoints between solstices and equinoxes. Many ancient civilizations and cultures also observed, not just the solstices and equinoxes, but the four midpoints between them, the cross quarter days. They are not always exact, and they go by different names, but their observance can assist us.

One of them you have certainly heard of: Halloween, which always seems to feature recognition of the dead. Horrors! Because the midpoint between the Fall equinox and the winter solstice is a recognition of things passing, the middle of the Fall.

This week brings another such cross quarter day: the midpoint between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox. This week is often recognized as the very depth of winter. Winter, after all, only began around December 21; it was still relatively warm then. This week recognizes the middle of winter, its depth.

Christians incorporate this physical phenomenon, whether we realize it or not, when we keep the Feast of the Presentation on February 2 (this past Friday), forty days after Christmas, when the child Jesus is presented in the Temple. Just as we celebrate Jesus being born on December 25, we celebrate his being presented in the temple forty days later, February 2.

Over time, that feast has incorporated candles, so that its other name is Candlemas. Whether we realize it is a cross-quarter day or not, Christians yearn for light on February 2; and we have lit candles on that winter feast, for hundreds of years.

Our own American culture has another name for February 2, don't we? It is Groundhog Day! It's a different name, and rather a silly-looking event, but its features are the same as the cross-quarter features of other cultures. For some reason or another, we looked to a groundhog to predict the future for us!

Whatever. On Groundhog Day, we were wondering about light, and shadow, and how much longer winter will be! Something in our human condition will always long for, and lean for, for light. We yearn for its energy, especially when we miss it the most – in the bleak midwinter.

But the Feast of the Presentation, and Candlemas, existed long before people observed Groundhog Day! There was a weather proverb recited about Candlemas long before there was a Groundhog Day. The proverb went like this:

*If Candlemas Day be fair and bright,
Winter will have another fight.
If Candlemas day brings clouds and rain,
Winter won't come again.*

Does that sound familiar? The sense is the same. The traditions of Candlemas existed before the traditions of Groundhog Day!

In a few minutes, observing Candlemas today, and the Feast of the Presentation, we will bless all candles everywhere. We will try to bring out all the candles in the Cathedral. When the children returned from Children's Chapel at the 8:45 service today, they brought candles back into the nave with them, singing, "This Little Light of Mine, I'm Going to Let It Shine." We will sing that too, in a few minutes.

We will pray today for light, as Christians have prayed for centuries. We will remember that Jesus is the Light, the Light of the World.

But Jesus also told us that *we, we ourselves*, are the light of the world.

It's not Groundhog Day that predicts whether light is returning to the world. The true spring, the true light, is *us* – you and me—and how we behave during the darkness. *You* are the light of the world, said Jesus; let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Let that light shine. And consider the places, in your own life, where you need light. Where do you need the light to shine in your own life? "There is nothing hidden that will not be revealed," said Jesus.

Yes, we are predicting the future today. When we gather at Candlemas, we are predicting the coming of spring. We are predicting light, growing gradually, in the world.

Because *we* are to be the ones growing it! We are to be creating the future, creating that light in the world! The future will be light, when we act like light in the world.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

AMEN.

**The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE

*This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

Hide it under a bushel, No! I'm gonna let it shine. ...

All around the neighborhood, I'm gonna let it shine. ...

I won't let anyone blow it out, I'm gonna let it shine. ...