

## “I Am the Light of the World”

Text: John 8:12-20  
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We are continuing our series on the “I Am” sayings of Jesus in the gospel of John. Last week we talked about the saying: “I am the Bread of Life”, and how when we are connected to Jesus we will never be hungry or thirsty again. Jesus is our spiritual nourishment –our bread of life. We talked about how Jesus was a master at communicating and taking the ordinary things of life and making spiritual connections. It was not an accident that he made the claim that he was the bread of life shortly after feeding over 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish.

In our text today he is communicating in much the same way in a different setting. This time Jesus is in the treasury of the Temple. The treasury of the Temple was a busy place. There were people coming and going all the time. Jesus was teaching there that day as worshipers were making their offerings.

In the treasury there were thirteen treasure chests into which people would place their offerings. These treasure chests were called trumpets because they were the shape of a trumpet. It’s interesting that every treasure chest had its own allotted offering. Into the first two chests were dropped the half shekel offerings that went to upkeep of the Temple. So the next time we have an air conditioning problem or need new carpet or paint, remember that maintenance of a church building is nothing new. The offerings for animals used in sacrifices were collected in the third and fourth chests. Into the fifth chest went the offerings for the wood to keep the altar fire alight. The sixth chest collected funds for the incense which was used at Temple services. The seventh chest collected offerings for the upkeep of the golden vessels. The rest of the chests were for general offerings. So be glad that-we don’t have thirteen-offering plates up here! Can you imagine the confusion? This plate is for upkeep of the building. This plate is for salaries. This plate is for missions. This plate is for children’s ministry...

Put yourself in the story. Jesus is teaching and visiting with people as they drop their coins in the treasure chests. Sally Sue is fumbling through her purse as she walks towards the chest for Temple upkeep. She likes to walk into a clean Temple so she makes an offering in the chest. Joe Blow really likes the lights at the altar so he makes a special offering in that chest. People are crisscrossing back and forth giving their offerings to the various chests, and then Jesus says it. Right there in the middle of the offering he says, “I am the light of the world.” Sally Sue drops her coins in disbelief. Joe Blow nearly passes out, and the Pharisees are furious. Jesus has, in effect, just said to the whole group: “I am God.” So why didn’t Jesus just say that. Why did he beat around the bush and say, “I am the light of the world.”?

Again, he was a master communicator and in that setting at that time, he couldn’t have said anything better or more appropriate. The Jews celebrated different festivals throughout the year, and it just so happened that this story occurs in conjunction with the Festival of Tabernacles. On the evening of the first day of this festival there was a ceremony called The Illumination of the Temple. There were four great candelabra which were all lit when it became dark. It has been said that the light coming from the candelabra was so great that it illumined every courtyard with its brilliance. So it was no surprise that Jesus talked about light in such a setting. The image of the candelabra was fresh in everyone’s mind.

Alisha and I like to go camping with the boys. We started out with a tent and then worked our way up to a pop-up camper. We bought one from some friends of ours in Dawson. They had owned this pop-up for 25 years and we bought it for \$800. It was great. We wanted to see if camping was really something we would enjoy doing as a family, and as it turned out, it is. We have a great time camping together.

Since purchasing our first pop-up, we have since sold it to Alisha's sister and her husband and have purchased a newer model. We just stumbled on this one at a garage sale. Usually, when I buy something used there is some sort of problem. So you can imagine my frustration when one weekend we went camping and the lights didn't work on the pop-up. Needless to say, I was not amused. I tried everything I could think of to get the lights to come on – fuses, switches, etc. Later that night as we were sitting in the dark some friends of ours who were camping the same weekend came over to our campsite. Ironically enough, these were the same people we bought the \$800 pop-up from which worked fine and didn't have any light problems!

I told Ronnie that the lights weren't working on the pop-up. Ronnie took a look at it and in five minutes our lights were working. You see the lights run off the battery, but a battery will not work unless you have it hooked up right. After charging the battery the week before, I got the wires crisscrossed when I reconnected them. The only malfunction was me, not the lights. Needless to say, there was great rejoicing when our campsite was illuminated by the lights from the pop-up. One minute we were fumbling around with a flashlight and the next we were surrounded by light.

That is exactly what it is like to be awakened to God's grace and love for us in Jesus. We are living in total darkness bumping into this and that, then suddenly as if a switch were flipped we see the light of God's grace and are changed. Jesus said, "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." It's amazing how we can go from complete and total despair to hope and joy, but that's how God's light works. Without warning we are blinded by it.

A few weeks ago I took Benjamin and his cousins, Maddie and Kalyn to the movies. At Thanksgiving I made the mistake of taking them to the movies by myself. This time I got some help from Maddie and Kalyn's dad, Greg. We went to see a movie about animals called *The Wild*. It was a bright sunny day and you know what it's like to walk out of a movie theater in the afternoon. For two hours we were sitting in a dark room, then when we opened the door to go outside, the light from the sun literally blinded us. It was so bright. Our eyes were used to it before we went into the movie, but after sitting in darkness for so long it took some time to get accustomed to the light again.

That's how it can be with our faith at times. We can live in darkness for so long without even realizing it, and then when we see the light of Jesus we are taken aback. We don't quite know what to do about it. It is so unlike anything else in our world that we don't really know what to do with it at first. It is a disorienting experience.

I can't think of a better example of this than what happened to Saul. Saul, later to be named Paul, was a devout Jewish man who made it his life's work to persecute the early Christians. He rounded them up, both men and women, and hauled them off to prison. One day he was walking on his way to Damascus when a light from heaven surrounded him and literally knocked him to his knees. He heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." And the rest

is history. Saul, one of the great persecutors of the Christian faith, became Paul, and ended writing much of our New Testament. Paul, that great ambassador of the Christian faith, had been transformed by the light. He had seen the light and the course of his life was changed. He wasn't looking for it. He didn't pray for it. He certainly didn't anticipate it. It just happened because God wanted it to happen and there was nothing Paul could do about it.

Don't think for a second that same light is not at work today. The same Jesus who called the disciples and brought Saul to his knees is the same one who could do the same to you today. I believe that we never stop learning and that it is never too late to become a changed person. I hope I never develop the attitude that I have seen all there is to see in life and have experienced all there is to experience. Sadly, some people live that way. They have "been there, done that" and anything new or different is dismissed. It is never too late to learn and it is never too late to start over.

George Burns won his first Oscar at the age of eighty. Michelangelo painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel lying on his back on scaffolding at seventy-one. Colonel Sanders never fried any chicken for money until he was sixty-five, and now Kentucky Fried Chicken is a household name. It is never too late to try something new and believe it or not, God is not finished with you. No matter what age you are there is something you can do for God's kingdom here on earth, and the light of Jesus is our guide along the way.

The Pharisees didn't exactly buy into Jesus' statement that he was the "light of the world". In fact, they were offended by it. For Jesus to say that he was the light of the world was saying that he was God and that did not set well with the religious establishment. I can certainly understand why the Pharisees would have been so put off by Jesus' statement. Claiming to be on the same level as God is awfully arrogant to say the least. They said to Jesus, "You are testifying on your own behalf your testimony-is not valid." They had made a good point. It was not as if several witnesses were lined up staking their life on the fact that this Jesus guy was God. They had to take Jesus' word for it. He was testifying on his own behalf. Anyone here know some kids that do that sort of thing?

Our boys are now in that stage where they fight a lot. They don't fight all the time and they are not what I would call abnormal. They are just little brothers and little brothers get into arguments from time to time. Benjamin is five and Andrew is two and sometimes it is quite amusing watching the two of them go back and forth. The other day I was in the garage taking some boxes to the trailer for our move when I Andrew came walking outside. He had that pouting look on his face and then uttered the phrase that we have come to know so well: "He hit me." He pointed at his big brother Benjamin and said, "He hit me!" Of course he was looking at me like I was the final authority on all things. Like a prosecutor making his final statement before the jury he said it over and over and over again, "He hit me! He hit me!" Do something about it daddy!

I am not the model of a perfect parent and have made many mistakes already, but I know enough now not to take a two year-old's word for it when there is a controversy. So I asked Benjamin, "Did you hit your brother?" "No, not exactly." Okay, parenting lesson number two – don't take a 5 year-old's word for it either. I solved the problem right away. Forget about testimonials and trying to figure out what really happened. I put an end to the discussion about who hit who right away. I looked at both boys square in the eye and said, "Ya'll want to go get some ice cream?" "Yeah! Let's go, let's go." I told you I wasn't the perfect father.

The Pharisees just couldn't bring themselves to believe what Jesus was saying about himself. He could have talked until he was blue in the face trying to convince them that he really was who he said he was, but it wouldn't have made a bit of difference because their minds were already made up. They were not open to experiencing Jesus. Our Christian faith is not something we have to defend or convince people about. If you want to bring someone to Jesus then bring someone to Jesus. Don't get in his way with a bunch of cliché religious lingo phrases. Just tell your story and how the light of Jesus has made a difference in your life. Open up the curtains and let the real light of the world shine through. Jesus is shining as bright as ever and you and I and goodness knows the rest of our messed world could stand to see the light a little more. It's dark enough these days.

I don't know how long you have been a part of this church. Some of you have been members here longer than I have been alive. Others of you may have been coming for only a few weeks. Who knows, there may be someone here today who is brand new to this church or the concept of church altogether. It doesn't really matter though, whether you have been here 60 years or one week like me, we must work together and share the light of Jesus with this community.

Grace Imathiu is a United Methodist pastor from Kenya. She has served congregations in Kenya and the United States and is a wonderful preacher. I once heard her tell a story her father told her when she was in the first grade. It was called "Our Elephant". It is a simple tale of a man who goes hunting in the forest and shoots down an elephant with his bow and arrow. He is so glad: imagine all that meat. He will not need to hunt for months on end, but there remains the demanding task of dragging the elephant back to his hut. Determined, he grabs the animal by one leg and pulls, attempting to budge the massive carcass, but the animal won't shift, it's far too heavy for one man to pull. Finally the elephant hunter goes back to his village – to ask for help. The villagers listen to his story and one of them asks, "Whose elephant is it?" "Mine, of course," replies the hunter. "If it is your elephant," the villager says, "it is your problem. Pull it home yourself"

As the villagers begin to leave and return to their homes, the hunter rethinks the problem and announces: "I have killed the elephant for all of us." The entire village breaks into celebration and quickly heads out to get the elephant. Men, women, children, everybody joins in. Even the aged and frail join the crowd, insisting that if they cannot help drag the elephant, they will cheer on the work.

And it worked. They got the elephant back to the village. What one person could not possibly do on his own, a community did together.