

**Sermon**  
**6 January 2019**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Reading: John 8:12-20

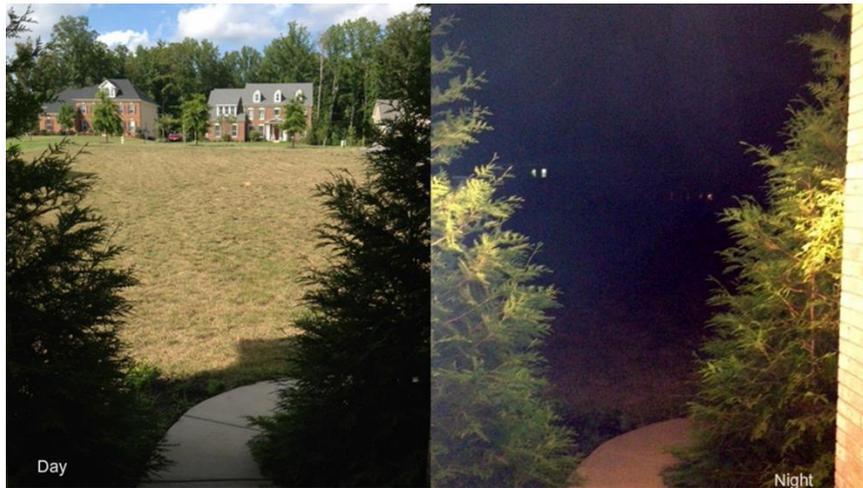
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Jesus Christ said: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

At the beginning of a brand new year, during the time of year when the nights are long and dark, and in a time where lots of people feel that the situation in the world around us, or personal circumstances, make their world much darker than they would like it to be, I can't think of a better new year's resolution than deciding to walk in the light of the Lord, every single day all through 2019.

Because Jesus is light, and where there is light, there can't be darkness...

Have a wee look at these 2 pictures.



It's 2 photos taken of the exact same place: Photo 1 was taken during the day and photo 2 during the night. So if we only had photo 2, we probably wouldn't even know that there are 2 houses sitting there, because it's too dark to see them. It's only when it's light that we can see the full picture.

And exactly the same thing is true for our lives. Without Jesus, our lives will be like picture 2. There will be lots more to our lives than we are aware of, but because we can't see it, we won't even know it exists. But *with* Jesus in our lives we'll be able to see and appreciate everything he makes a part of our lives.

Light makes such a big difference! Let me try to explain this in another way.

We went on a road trip up north for a few days between Christmas and New Year, and spent lots of time in the car, showing off our beautiful Scotland to André's family.

During the day, we could see for miles ahead, especially as we had really gorgeous weather, with the winter sun at its best. But at night, we could only see where the car's headlights lit up the road. But thank goodness for headlights! Without headlights we wouldn't have been able to travel at night at all, because we wouldn't have been able to see where we were going, and we could very easily have driven down a ditch or even into an oncoming vehicle, and in that way not only been a danger to ourselves but to others too.

See what I mean when I say that if we want to get anywhere in this very often dark world we live in, we need light to guide us, to show us the way?

Just like we can't drive in the dark without headlights, we can't go through life without Jesus...

*Because, as we've just read in John 8, Jesus is the light for the world.*

Very often, when we read the Bible straight off the page, we miss much of the significance of the words because we do not know the context.

Today's passage is a case in point, so let's take a look at the background of our reading...

It was the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. It was a time for the Jews to reflect back on the time when God led his people out of Egypt.

Those were frightening days. Pharaoh had been left weeping in his palace over the death of his son and he chased the people of God into the wilderness. So they took their first steps of freedom.

But they had been bound up in Egypt for 400 years. They did not know the land to which they were heading, nor did they know the way. But God led them there – with a cloud by day and a fiery pillar by night.

The Feast of the Booths was built around that wilderness wandering, and for a week the Jews remembered the wilderness generation by building tents and living in them. But it was not the wilderness they celebrated during this festival, it was the *light*.

This feast took place on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of 7<sup>th</sup> month – the time of year when, as the sun is setting the moon is rising – so that there is never a time when there is not a light in the sky.

It was a spectacular festival. There were 4 huge lamps that would burn for the whole 7 days and nights. The light would reflect off the gates and walls off the temple and could be seen for miles around the city. It would have been a spectacular sight.

As the Jews sat in their tents during the feast, they remembered the light was always with them, the fiery pillar, the light in the sky, the guidance of God in the wilderness, always there for them in the place where they had no map or experience.

And it's into this context that Jesus speaks of himself with these famous words about being the light.

All the symbols of light and God's presence are fulfilled in Jesus; the light that guided the ancients across the wilderness and into the promised land is that which is found in Jesus.

Jesus, the light who still guides us today. The story of freedom and new life and liberation from that which binds us and those powers that entrap us, continues in Jesus.

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Just like for the Israelites of old, life is still a journey for all of us today. We have just taken a new turn, into the year 2019.

So it's of the utmost importance that we take Jesus along with us on this journey – so we'll be able to see where we are going.

Just like the headlights on a car illuminate the road ahead and make it possible for us to see the road signs, so we can know what to do and what not to do, what to look out for and where we are going; God does exactly the same thing for us for our journey through life. Through his Word and his Spirit he gives us road signs – warnings and directions to keep us safe and to help us not to get lost; but we'll only be able to see these if we have Jesus with us to light up the road ahead of us.

If we adhere to these signs, we'll reach our destination safely.

So let's take a look at some of these signs:



God wants us to take care of his beautiful creation and to live our lives in such a way that we don't ruin even the smallest of creatures or things he made.



He also wants us to take care of each other; to never leave anybody behind, but to take them by the hand if they need guiding or support.

If we do these things, it doesn't mean that our roads will always be straight and easy though...



Every single journey has bends in it, unexpected twists and turns; but if we just stay focussed and follow the road, God will get us where we need to be.



And the same goes for bumps. Nobody likes a bumpy road, but sometimes God has very good reasons for wanting to slow us down.



Sometimes he will even bring us to a complete stop. Because very often we can get so caught up in where we are heading, that we don't take in what's going around us...



God knows very well that sometimes things happen to us that make us feel confused, lost, unsure, unclear, or even perplexed; he knows that sometimes we have no idea where we're going or what we should be doing, and it's during times like these that he'll let us give way



to others first, that he'll force us to make a comma in our lives to just be reminded that we are never alone – because if we just carry on without paying attention to other people on the road, we might just end up in a huge big accident.



If we need a break from everything, if we need to refuel and take a little rest, he'll show us the way to the services – which is actually where we are at this very moment.



And if we get hurt, He'll show us where to go to get the help we need, 24/7...

All we need to do is stay on the road with him, because he knows where he is going with us. He'll lead us in the right way, HIS way, the only way.



So this year, let's not take any diversions from the way of God. Let's live in the light, let's see his love for us and trust him when the going gets tough – because at least we'll know for certain – even if the road is difficult to travel on, that with Jesus by our side, we'll never get lost and we'll always be able to see where we are going.

May 2019 be a year filled with love, laughter, and most of all *light* – for all of you and all those you care about.

Amen