

30 August 2020

West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Drs Jonanda & André Groenewald

Reading: John 8:12-20

Hymn: CH4 448 Lord the light of your love is shining

PRAYER

Our Father in and through Jesus you are the light of the world,
your light heals us,
shining into every corner of our being,
exposing the lies we have told ourselves
and the lies that have been told to us.

Thank you for your truth that sets us free.

Jesus, you are the light of the world,
shine in the world you came to save,
show us the truth about your plan for humanity,
and enable us to set our feet on the paths that lead to peace,
so that all your people may be free.

Help us, Lord, to be followers of Your light.

Help us to turn away from darkness and be drawn to the strength of your
light.

We ask this in the Name of Jesus who taught us to pray:

Our Father, who are in heaven

Hallowed by your Name

Your kingdom come

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread

And Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil
For you are the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever.

Amen.

READING

John 8:12-20 (NIV)

¹² When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'

¹³ The Pharisees challenged him, 'Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid.'

¹⁴ Jesus answered, 'Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵ You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. ¹⁶ But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. ¹⁷ In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. ¹⁸ I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.'

¹⁹ Then they asked him, 'Where is your father?'

'You do not know me or my Father,' Jesus replied. 'If you knew me, you would know my Father also.' ²⁰ He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his hour had not yet come.

MESSAGE

The context of our reading is the Feast of the Tabernacles – a very important religious festival on the calendar in New Testament times.

During this feast, in the evenings, the temple court would be illuminated with lights while the people worshipped and praised God with song.

It is within this context that Jesus claimed that He is the LIGHT of the world.

But instead of taking in what he said, the Pharisees went into this huge big discussion as to validity of Jesus' words, because in those days a testimony would only be seen as true if 2 people bore witness to it.

And the more Jesus tried to explain that, actually, God testified to his words, the less they heard. And unfortunately, I think sometimes that is still true today – we can get so bogged down with technicalities, that we can easily miss the point altogether.

So let's not make that mistake today, and truly listen to what Jesus wants to teach us.

He said: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

So what does this mean exactly?

Let's talk about *darkness* for a few minutes.

I am sure all of us are occasionally weary of darkness. I often hear from people who are on their own how long the night can sometimes feel.

If you are lying in the dark and you cannot sleep, your mind keeps wandering – sometimes in unexpected directions.

Sometimes as you toss and turn and think, you almost wish for the morning to come. Everything always seems so much worse at night. Scarier.

Why is it then that darkness has such an effect on us as humans?

Maybe it has to do with the fact that we cannot see in the dark; that we can only rely on our other senses, which can sometimes play tricks on us.

It is almost as if in the darkness we lose touch with reality and time.

In Biblical times it was indeed a darker world – I mean this literally. They did not have streetlamps or electric lights in their houses. Even during the day it was quite dark inside, because they had very small windows. When it was **dark**, it was indeed *dark*.

I can just imagine how Jesus' words gave them *hope*: namely that He will be their LIGHT guiding them. Jesus' light gave them renewed trust and courage to face the choices that lied ahead.

Because the minute *light* comes into the picture, everything changes!

Let me illustrate this to you. (*Switch light off.*)

Now that it's dark around me – you can still hear me, but not see me! It's just not the same, is it? And if I were to deliver a whole sermon in the dark like this, I bet your mind will start wandering really quickly!

Light makes all the difference!

Even a small flame can take the darkness away – like this one Nanda, 'the light of my life', is carrying! (*Nanda lights candle, switch lights on again.*)

'Light of my life!' Have you ever used that expression? A term of endearment... We'll call someone we love, someone who makes our lives better, the light of our lives!

And that is literally what Jesus tells us HE is, in the passage we read together today: He is the light of the world, the light of our lives.

And if we just make sure we follow him, stay close to him, we will never have to walk in darkness.

Never!

Because even in the darkest moments of our lives, the presence of Jesus will mean that that the darkness won't be able to consume us. Because light is stronger than darkness.

Just like we associate dark with things we are afraid of, we associate *light* with things that bring us joy.

Light makes it possible for you to see.

We have this cupboard beneath the stairs, where we keep our shoes and other bits and pieces. And honestly – it can frustrate me so much if I'm looking for something in there, because even if it's light outside – it's pitch dark in that cupboard!

The easy solution to this problem is of course to just install a light in the cupboard. But until *the light of my life*, my dear husband with his 10 thumbs, gets round to doing that one day, I'm just using a wee flashlight.

And the minute I switch the flashlight on – I can see where what is and I find what I am looking for in no time.

In the same way Jesus came to earth to show us where what is! He came to show us how to live. What to do and how to do it.

It's easy to lose things in the dark, but if we stay close to Jesus, we won't ever lose anything. We won't lose our sense of purpose. We won't lose our compassion. We won't lose hope.

You don't have to tread carefully during the day, but at night there might be hidden obstacles you can fall over. If you stay close to Jesus, he won't only light your path, he'll even take your hand!

Having faith doesn't mean that there won't be any obstacles in your way; that life will always be easy. But it does mean that you will be able see what is going on, plan what to do accordingly, and if unexpected things happen to you – well, then you will have someone to guide you through it and keep you on your feet.

Our world can sometimes be very dark. And if there were different shades of black, Covid19 most certainly would be the darkest of them all! The coronavirus is making it very dark around us at the moment.

But, we don't have to despair. Because no matter how dark it is – like I've said before: light is always stronger than darkness, and Jesus IS the light of the world.

So let's make sure that we always stay close to him, because then – no matter what happens to us – we know that we will get through it.

The Pharisees were questioning who could bear witness to the words of Jesus. That is our job now, as believers. WE are his witnesses.

So let's do our job well. If we stay close to Jesus and at the same time let our own lights shine, we will be able to light up this dark world in such a way that eventually nobody will ever have to feel scared and alone again.

Let's love, and give, and care, and reach out, and protect, and forgive, and rejoice – because Jesus did all these things first, for us.

As the nights are drawing in and the winter is slowly creeping closer – let's hold on to the words of Jesus: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Amen

HYMN

CH4 448:1-3

Lord, the light of your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us
Set us free by the truth you now bring us
Shine on me, shine on me

Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word
Lord, and let there be light

Lord, I come to your awesome presence
From the shadows into your radiance
By the blood I may enter your brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness
Shine on me, shine on me

Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy

*Send forth your word
Lord, and let there be light*

As we gaze on your kingly brightness
So our faces display your likeness
Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here may our lives tell your story
Shine on me, shine on me

*Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word
Lord, and let there be light*