

*Let there be light.* A sermon preached on January 10, 2016 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: GENESIS 1:1-5  
JOHN 8:12-16

**I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me  
will never walk in darkness but will have the  
light of life (vs. 12)**

What a perfect and hopeful affirmation for the bleak mid-winter for Canada and the northern U.S.

In this season of long darkness and short day light and often gray days

I think it is a most up building and encouraging text and not merely for meteorological reasons, But because it is a very clear reminder that darkness – physical and metaphorical – is not the last word – *light and illumination are!*

And do we not need that reminder – particularly at this time of the year when physical darkness so often reflects our own moods, worries, anxieties despair and discouragement?

It is tough for a lot of people – this season after Christmas

Tough owing to nagging sniffles, coughs and being physically run down

Tough owing to heightened emotional strains –  
from the expectations placed on us in the past  
few weeks

Tough owing perhaps to economic or family  
realities.

Now, Jesus' first audience did not face a  
bleak mid-winter.

But they lived under Roman occupation – which  
was rarely benevolent and kind.

And they could not just flip a switch and on came  
a light

Their lives were conditioned to sunrise and  
sunset because even the lamps in existence did  
not give off much light

So when Jesus makes the claim in verse 12  
His first readers could not help but pay attention.

Here was Jesus describing himself as one who  
would repel the darkness as he walked  
The object and places that cast only frightening  
shadows would now be illumined, visible and  
identifiable.

We are a long way in time and space  
from Jesus' first audience.

We can with a flick of a switch or the push of a  
button create more candlepower around us than  
Jesus' first listeners and several generations after  
could not imagine in their wildest dreams.

So while this particular I am may not have  
the visual power it once did

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD continues to declare in a clear and no nonsense way ...there are only two ways to live

- ✓ The way of light – which is the way of Jesus
- ✓ The way of darkness – the alternative to Jesus.

We will follow one or the other way.

Take our eyes off Jesus and the way will be the way of darkness – however attractive, beguiling and great it looks – it is still the way of darkness

Here in chapter 8 of John's Gospel, Jesus is not given the opportunity to expand on this particular I AM, for those meddling Pharisees take him away from the topic and ask him about God his father

Even then, with Jesus answer, they continue to misunderstand what Jesus tells them.

What does this particular I AM say to us?

*It is not a claim that suggests Jesus lived his earthly life, walking around like some glowing light bulb*

Poor choice on my part of this morning's bulletin graphic

On earth, Jesus had the natural appearance of a man

However,

Throughout the gospels, the letters and the Revelation, references are made to Jesus;' face,

demeanor and action as reflective of the glory of God.

Jesus opening statement about his public ministry reflects this **I am the light of the world**

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,

<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’

Luke 4:18-19

*Nor is Jesus’ I am the light of the world an isolated or one off claim in matters related to the presence and immediateness of God in this life.*

The images of light and darkness are peppered throughout scripture – from Genesis to Revelation

I for one cannot hear read or read myself those opening verses of Genesis read this morning by Faith without saying “WOW! I mean WOW

Then in Exodus, the light of God takes the form of the fiery pillar by day and the beacon by night that leads the Israelites out of Egypt.

Then one moves through Daniel, Ezekiel and Zachariah

Zechariah – that passage we highlighted from the writing of this minor prophet the week we considered Zechariah

Lampstand, fed by oil from the two olive trees – flowing into a large bowl

This is the light of the Lord ever burning before the Ark of the Covenant

Light glancing off the polished gold of the Mercy Seat above the Ark

And illuminating the Table with the Bread of the Presence.

Into the New Testament, Simeon lifting up baby Jesus and declaring Jesus

<sup>32</sup> **a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.’ Luke 2:32**

There is Jesus’ transfiguration [Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-13, Luke 9:28-36] where Peter, James and John see and hear clear evidence of the holy – a thin place where God is very close indeed!

Paul is blinded temporarily when he sees a vision of the Risen Christ on the Damascus Road

So the things of God,

The actions of God are always surrounded, bathed or soaked in the image of light – always! Jesus **‘I am the light of the world** then is another affirmation, restatement of this fact.

Specifically, **I am the light of the world** is a *warning to indicate danger around us.*

Just as a lighthouse warns ships of rocks, sandbars and treacherous water,

The light of Jesus warns us, as it has been warning followers of Jesus for 2000 years that there are dark and dangerous things out there.

There are behaviors, actions and thoughts that if allowed to run rampant will cause us to flounder, be ruined, destroyed or broken apart.

There are storms in this life that will expose us to temptations of which we never dreamed – and again if left unchecked will crush us,

However strong we may think we are...

There is a story told of a battleship commander who on a dark and very foggy night saw a light in the distance.

After taking note of the light's co-ordinates, the commander recognized his ship was on a collision course with the other vessel

The commander instructed his radio operator to signal that ship

“We are on a collision course, advise you change course 20 degrees.”

The return signal came back – “Advise for YOU to change course 20 degrees.”

The commander signaled again – “I am a commander, change course 20 degrees.”

The response – “I am an seaman second class , you had better change course 20 degrees.”

By this time, the commander was livid and the collision seemed imminent

“I am a battleship – change course 20 degrees.”

The reply – “I am a lighthouse – you make the call!!”

How often do we in this life behave exactly like that battleship commander – believe we are always right, our way is the only way, never admitting that maybe, just maybe, we could be wrong or in error?

To the point of ignoring the warnings in this life illuminated by the warnings of Jesus.

For in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus reminds us that his being light of the world is to have practical effects on our lives

We are the light of the world(vs14)

Further, we are to

**...let our light shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven (vs.16)**

How do you suppose we can do justice and honour that privilege and responsibility if we – each or any of us – are not ourselves prepared to follow, be guided and be sensitive to the warnings in this life given by Jesus?

**I am the light of the world** is also *not just a warning beacon to protect from periodic dangers in this life,*

*It is also a guide for living each day as a follower of Jesus.*

Here, I equate Jesus' claim to be closely related to the pillar of fire God gave the Israelites to lead them from slavery in Egypt to hope and promise in a new land.

For 40 years the fiery pillar by night and the pillar of cloud by day acted as a guide to the people.

At night we are told the pillar of fire actually moved, illuminating the path in which the people were to tread.

Through God's Holy Spirit, Jesus is still guiding us day by day

- Helping us to discern what is his purpose for our lives
- Helping us to decide which direction we should take on a certain matter when it is particularly unclear
- Helping us to deal with difficult people
- Reminding us of his promises
- Guiding us through times of loneliness, angers, hurt, despair and distrust.
- Guiding us through times of ecstasy, unmitigated joy and relief
- Guiding us to be thankful in all things

- Guiding us through times of anxiety and worry – reminding us for example that NOTHING shall ever separate us from God’s love in Jesus.

**I am the light of the world** – shares with all the I AM claims in scripture *an opportunity or a call to decide for or against the God who has already decided for us in Jesus Christ.*

That is,

We hear this claim, the other claims of scripture and they each leave us with a choice don’t they? Do we believe the claim or the affirmation or not? If we say, of course we believe, then how are we going to show it as we live our lives?

You see,

Many say, of course I believe, but then their lives clearly reflect that they are living very differently.

Some are living what 19thc American essayist, Henry David Thoreau so evocatively described as lives of quiet desperation.

They do not believe anything good can happen, because they have ceased having any hope

They see everything as cyclic, because they have lost that sense of wonder, awe and possibilities

The tyranny of the immediate wears them down to a nubbin because in many instances they have forgotten that God is in control and he is the God of the impossible situation.

They think only on old hurts, painful memories unresolved conflicts of the past and have let these mortgage the present and the future.

They come to believe – wrongly by the way – about a whole bunch of things related to God and his promises

They come to believe that hope, new possibilities, new chances are for and about others – not them!

Look,

I am under no illusion of how difficult it is to break out of lives of quiet desperation, Negative energy driven lives.

I am under no illusion that this can happen once and for all – that fighting the negative and desperation only has to be done once.

You say, all you want you say is to live a safe and secure life?

Reality check – life is difficult – there is no safe and secure – not this side of heaven

The unexpected the unnecessary, the unwarranted, the unneeded, the unwanted are part of this world – whether you are a follower of Jesus or not

Being a follower of Jesus will not remove you or protect you from experiencing difficult times

However, being a follower of Jesus, holding to such affirmations as **I am the light of the world**

Reminds us that darkness and difficulty in this world is not the final word.

We need not live each day feeling that no one is there.

God is here and he is not silent.

That is not some sort of holy triumphalism by the way,

But in this life is difficult world, it remains a promise that never changes – never!

That is the promise, the affirmation

**I am the light of the world, whosoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.**

How do you respond?

How shall you reflect that response in your everyday life?

AMEN