

*It's Dark out Here! Where is the Light?* A sermon preached on September 18, 2016 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC, as part of a series on I John, by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: GENESIS 1:2-3

I JOHN 1:5-7

JOHN 8:12

Throughout most of my undergraduate degree, I was fortunate to work during the summers for the Ontario government at a provincial park located on the north shore of Lake Erie.

It was a great work experience and I learned so much about myself and dealing with others – staff as well as campers.

One of the realities of the park, as all you who camp on a regular basis knows is that dark means DARK!

You can stand 5 feet from a campfire and not be seen

You need a flashlight if you want to move any distance,

Lest you trip on a rock, tree root or as was often the case in this particular park an inebriated person who had passed out just off the campsite.

And tripping on a tree root or rock was not the worse that could happen.

The loamy and sandy soil of Norfolk County was a perfect growing medium for poison ivy.

The staff endeavoured to keep this noxious plant away from well-travelled pathways,

But there are always people who are determined to follow their own path, posted warning signs notwithstanding!

A wonderful place during the day – even with the poison ivy then

A scary place at night – if you did not have a portable light source – lantern or flashlight.

How many of you have been in a place where dark really means dark?

Sometimes even our in our own homes, to suddenly awake and need to go to the bathroom without night lights can be disorienting.

Nighttime driving on road with no street lamps can be scary can't it?

The Bible uses words like darkness and light both the Old and New Testaments as symbols or images of God,

Of the nature and character of God

And even today,

Darkness and light are powerful words when it comes to understanding the nature of God.

Last week,

We considered the opening verses of John's letter.s letter.

He was we saw, laying important groundwork,

Foundations really that God's people then and now need to keep front and centre.

Provenance – the history of God's work in Jesus – with no gaps from the apostolic witness into the present day

Fellowship – our ongoing relationship with God

Joy – complete satisfaction in life because Jesus is who he is,

The total realization of what He has done for us first.

What John then is primarily concerned about and he will return to this over and over again is *how our relationship with God – the vertical – can work together with our relationship with others – the horizontal and be maintained in spite of various hindrances and obstacles.*

None of this is as they say, rocket science – requiring secret knowledge or special training.

All of this is basic Biblical teaching and fundamental

However,

If any of us fail to understand it as we ought,

We will find ourselves overwhelmed in a way God never expects in the lives of those who put their faith and trust in Him.

To build on what John has already said, he gives us two more “givens” in terms of

understanding and therefore living out the Christian life.

Always, always, always – *we must start with God*

This is what John is saying in the first part of verse 5

**This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you**

Before he goes any farther in the letter, he returns to similar words which begin the letter

This message comes from God.

Surely the very first and basic thing for Christian people says John is that they *should start with God*.

And yet many of our troubles arise in the Christian life,

Because we do not start at this point

So many people assume that they believe in God and that therefore they need not be concerned about examining their beliefs.

I have always believed in God, says someone, it has never occurred to me not to believe in Him

So in all their thought about these things, they tend not to start with God,

Because they assume that.

Rather they tend to start with themselves!

The Bible is constantly reminding us that we must *start with God*.

That is harder to do than one might think, for the world in which we live, feeds on self-centered and selfish.

So many of us argue like this,  
 “Here I am in this world with its troubles and I am uneasy, anxious, and uncertain  
 I am looking for something  
 I do not have that which will ease and even remove these feelings of anxiety and uncertainty

The tendency therefore is to approach God and the Christian truth and everything else in terms of my desires and MY demands

What has God got to say to me and to give me?

What can I get out of this Christian faith and religion?

Is there something in this that is going to ease my problems and help me in this dark and difficult world?

Here John says to his readers – then and now – forget thinking about you first and contemplate God

**This is the message which we have heard from him. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.**

Immediately we start with God and we are silenced, We are put into the background.

We are not considering human beings first and foremost

It is God.

It starts with HIM

**In the beginning...God**

And He must remain centre

I had grown up in the church,  
 Been trained at a recognized college of the PCC  
 Been licensed, ordained and inducted into three  
 different churches before the centrality of God  
 emerged in a way that there was no turning back.

I can tell you the day and place and  
 appropriate time that this light dawned  
 It was at Jane's baptism on December 9, 1990 within  
 St. Andrew's, Sackville.

The guest preacher that morning was Bill Isaac a  
 senior minister and mentor of both Katharine and  
 me.

Bill wasn't even preaching on the particular text he  
 cited in the course of the sermon.

But when he spoke it one of those wondrous  
 moments within the Christian life when the light of  
 God shone particularly brightly.

The verse Bill cited was from the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of  
 John's gospel – verse 16

**You did not choose me, but I chose you.**

Boom!!

It is not about me

It is not about you

It's not about us

IT'S ABOUT GOD.

Everything, everything we do, think or say is  
 a response to God's action first  
 God is the primary – not us  
 Christianity is not about what we're doing for the  
 Lord.

Rather, the Christian faith is about responding to  
 what God has already done for us.

John does not say – this is the sort of picture I  
 have of God

He does not say – as a result of much thought,  
 meditation and reading, this is the idea I have now  
 arrived at concerning God

**NO this is the message we have heard from him  
 and proclaim to you**

What I am telling you is what my fellow apostles  
 and I heard from Him and heard about Him

It all begins with God – not us, not our ideas!  
 HIM!

Then note the words to describe God that follow.

Light and darkness

Powerful images even now.

It may surprise us that God begins with the  
 images of light and darkness.

Given what precedes verse 5 we might think he  
 would say,

God is love,

God is mercy

God is compassion, but he doesn't say any of those things

...GOD IS LIGHT AND IN HIM THERE IS NO DARKNESS AT ALL

Light – a symbol of holiness

Utter, absolute holiness and purity

Knee drop awesomeness

Absolute perfection

Absolute justice, absolute righteousness

The light which is God enables us to see things that have been there all the time, \but which we could never see fully until His light shines upon it.

God's holiness...

I wonder if John's first readers were finding the world and its voices looking better than the way of Jesus.

I wonder if the world's chirps, whistles and promises were threatening to put out the sacred fires.

I wonder whether there was just a rising malaise and indifference about the Gospel.

Today, it is no secret that the claims of Jesus often get lost in the clamour of many voices vying for our heart and soul.

Technology – unbridled and without governors – remains a prime enemy of reverence.

Think not – talk about video games to parents of young boys and men!

Consumerism – the perceived need for more – fed by anxiety and fear of not enough of the right sort of stuff – clouds the reality of a God who will provide to meet all our needs and a considerable number of our wants.

More than one colleague in ministry has lamented –how can you convince people they need Jesus when they can buy or charge anything their hearts desire or think they need!!

How subtle it can happen where our primary centre of focus moves off God to ourselves,  
 “Look at what we have done  
 Ought not our view as God’s people be – look at what God has done through me, through us.  
 Without that sort of perspective of God’s holiness, it is not at all difficult to turn scriptural givens on their ear.

Many years ago,  
 There was a case before the courts of a man suing his minister.

Not as random as you think by the way

The case rested on the man claiming false preaching from the minister.

Apparently on a Sunday, the minister had cited the text “Cast your bread upon the waters” from Ecclesiastes 11

The minister urged his congregation to be charitable and generous,

Telling them that God would reward them tenfold.

The man subsequently made a sizeable contribution to the church and when his business did not prosper,  
Sued the minister for false preaching  
The case was thrown out of court largely in part because the minister was able to show to the judge that giving money IN ORDER TO BE richly compensated was calculated investment,  
Not Christian generosity, based upon God's generosity to each of us first.

John's counsel to his reader then, remains sound counsel today – for each of us.  
Start with God first – not the opinions or views of others,  
Not the principles of some self-improvement or self-help book  
As you do this, place God's holiness front and center  
Remind yourself of His Otherness  
And yet though the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit – his personal involvement in each of our lives.  
Pretty basic stuff really  
But how hard it can be to remember and put into active practice, not only when we feel so inclined,  
But all the time. AMEN