



feeding...gathering...carrying...leading. (Isiah 40:11)

Dearest Church family,

Thanks for joining me this weekend as we briefly touched on an aspect of God which seems often overlooked in our reading of scripture. In fact, it is not a characteristic I think we commonly attribute to anyone. We can easily see how words like good, faithful, holy, love, or judge could describe God, or even how these qualities might be present in the people around us. But Sunday, I made the case for another prevalent aspect of how God identifies Himself. Often in our Western Church culture, and even during our quick survey on Sunday, many of us will complete the phrase "God is..." with the word "love". Just as the Jews of the Old Testament would have likely completed that phrase with the word "holy". What I presented Sunday was a scriptural exploration of God's self-declaration, both in the Old Testament and through Jesus in the New Testament, that He is Light. One author stated that it is likely the early church would have completed the phrase, "God is" with the word light.

GOD IS LIGHT

Interestingly, the books often attributed to love – Gospel of John and 1 John – are also full of references to God as light. John 1:1-9 begins with a different angle of the life of Jesus Christ. He doesn't start with the prophetic geologies of man, showing that Jesus is in the line of David or a descendant of Abraham. John starts his gospel making reference, not to the human nature of the Godman, but to His divine nature. And in these first 9 verses, Light is mentioned 7 times, and the Word is mentioned twice. These two qualities, Word and Light, would have been an important connection for the Jews confirming Jesus' claim, to be not just a prophet, but to be God Himself. God often reveals Himself in the form of light in the Old Testament (e.g. Burning bush, fire by day, Moses face radiating light after being in the Lord's presence). Light was an important quality of the very nature of God that revealed Jesus to be of the same, as we confess in the Nicene Creed, "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light..."

Jesus declares that He is the Light of the world in John 8:12 when the Pharisees bring the woman caught in adultery to Him to test Him. I would say one major challenge we face these days is how to address sexuality in our culture. There is a lot to learn from Jesus in this example: He demonstrates an incredible grace – to all who are there, not just the woman. He also expresses a judgement - not that there is no sin, but that all have sinned. He engages compassionately and with love towards the woman when presented with her sin. He deals justly considering she must not have been the only one caught in the act of adultery. But when He gets a couple of minutes alone with this woman, who does He declare Himself to be? LIGHT. My challenge is that we ask the Lord why light was an important revelation at this moment. What does light reveal in this situation that is different to what love or holiness would have communicated? Ultimately, is not love more potent and powerful in our lives once Light reveals our deepest shames and Love still embraces us?

WE ARE LIGHT

Before we look at our calling to be light as He is light, we must remember how we are first to encounter the light ourselves. John 3:16-21 (also known mainly for love) is full of references to how we will be judged by our acceptance or rejection of the Light of Christ. In the judgement series Bo pointed out multiple times that we must always first apply God's judgment to ourselves. Just as we cannot pull the speck out of our brother's eye until we pull the log out of our own, we must also recognize that the Light of Christ first exposes, encounters and cleanses us before we can shine as lights in the world. In John 3:19-21, 1 John 1:1-9, Matthew 5: 14-16, Ephesians 5:8-14 and Philippians 2:14-16 a connection is made between our deeds (good and evil) and light or darkness. In choosing to walk in the light, we are not declaring that we are perfect in our works, but rather that we are transparent with our actions. Remember 1 John 1:8 says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Walking in the light is choosing to agree with God about

all of our deeds – the good, the bad and the ugly. So, we must first be encountered **by** the Light before we can expect to grow in our calling to **be** light.

Our commission in Matthew 5:14-16 is not just communicated in the form of a simile. It isn't "shine as a light in the world". It is "You ARE the light of the world." The verb used is the same verb used in all of Jesus' "I am" statements. This is not a simile referring to something we put on and take off, it is something to be absorbed in our very being - an expression of self. Think of Moses when he came down from being with God in Mount Sinai and had to be veiled because the light which shone from him was so bright. He could not take it off, it became part of Him. But the light did fade the longer Moses was outside of God's presence, until it was completely gone. We have the privilege of constant contact with the Light of the World, but as scripture often exhorts us, we can choose to walk in that light or not. When we willfully choose to "take part in the unfruitful works of darkness" (Ephesians 5:11) our own expression of light is compromised as we choose darkness over the Light. As light, we must first stay connected to the Source of Light, and then allow light to be expressed to those around us. This may be challenging, as light is often noted to expose the things happening in the dark. But I do not even think we have to point things outright, as 1 Peter 4:4 declares those in darkness "are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery." Within our groups of friends and co-workers, our mere choice not to participate in dark acts, even things like grumbling and complaining (Philippians 2: 14-16) or drunkenness (1 Thessalonians 5:5-7) can shine a light into the hearts of those around us. It is important that we are in places where we can shine and stand out in the midst of the dark things going on around us. Maybe then people we ask the simple question, "why?" and we will have a chance to share about our own experience of the Light!

WHAT ABOUT DARKNESS?

We cannot address light without also discussing the darkness that often feels so overwhelming. When thinking about darkness in the macro scale, as Ephesians 6 puts it, we are at war against the "rulers of the darkness of this age." I can feel rather discouraged about light's ability amid a dark world, nation, city, and neighborhood. Is my light that weak? Is the Church's light that weak? Or is darkness that strong? As I pondered this question, the Lord brought me to the scripture where He bestows upon Abraham the potent image of the descendants of the faith in Genesis 15:5, "Then He brought him outside and said "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And he said, "So shall your descendants be."

Obviously, this is about numbers at a time when Abraham was worried about having even one child. God is declaring He will be the father of the faith. But as I read it again, I also couldn't help but pick up on the stars in the midst of a dark night. Or as Philippians 2:15 says, "that amidst a crooked generation we would shine as lights in the world." Maybe this Genesis illustration to Abraham was not just about the numbers, might it also have referred to how we would shine as lights in the world? Was it not the stars that led travelers of old to their final destinations? In fact, wasn't it just one, lone bright star – shining during the dark of night – that guided the wise men, and shepherds, and bystanders to the Son of God. And even the Son of God Himself, the Light of the World, did not in His days on earth destroy all the darkness around Him. The darkness we continue to see around us in our places of influence, even within the church, can be very discouraging. Unlike our day to day experience of light, where we just flip on a switch and darkness goes away, it seems as though our expression of light in the world will be much more like Jesus' own final description of Himself in Revelation 22:16, "I, Jesus, am the Root and Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." So, when our co-workers or family seem to continue to persist in their darkness, even as we shine near them as a light in the world, may we remember that the stars can still guide people to their final destination!

In the Light of Christ,
Monique