

“We belong to the light”

March 22, 2009

Text: Isaiah 60:1-5, John 3:14-21

I.

One of the things I like most about John’s gospel is that it asks us to make a decision. You can’t stay on the fence forever in the gospel of John. You gotta choose; you have to make a decision.

- You have to say YES or NO.
- You’re either in or you’re out ...
- You either believe or you don’t believe ...
- You either belong to the light or you belong to the darkness.

And again, we have to decide. What’s it going to be?

I like that. There’s passion there. There’s excitement. We can’t just waffle our way through another listless moment of life.

John comes after us. He wants a decision. He wants us to decide, today, who we are. To whom do we belong? Where do our commitments lie?

Of course, John has a definite answer for us on this. As Christians, without question, we belong to the light. Why? Because, clearly, overwhelmingly, Jesus IS the light. That’s John’s message.

II.

We get a clue of this, right away, in the first words of the prologue to the gospel in John 1:

- *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*
- *He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.*
- *What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*
- *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

Again, for John, Jesus IS the light. Light is one of the rich, *life-giving* symbols of the Bible. Light enables us to see ... anything and everything—the beauty and wonder of the world around us, the good from the bad, virtue from vice.

We say, about certain ideas and people, that *they are enlightened*, by which we mean they bear the light of God’s wisdom and truth in them.

- Certainly, Jesus was *enlightened* with these qualities.
- We think of the Dali Lama as *enlightened*, a person through whom truth and wisdom seem to flow.

Contrasts between light and darkness are made frequently in the Bible. Thus, in the *I am* statements in John's gospel, Jesus says,

- *I am the light of the world ...and going on,*
- *whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.*

What we get from John, and from the Bible about all of this, is an affirmation and a sense of direction: ***Go where the light is!***

That's it! That's what we're to do with our lives. ***Go where the light is!***

III.

I've told the story before about the man who's had a bit too much to drink. The man is on his hands and knees beneath the streetlight apparently searching for something on the sidewalk.

A friend comes by and says, *Sam, what are you doing?*

I'm looking for my house key, Sam replies. *I lost my house key.* Wanting to be helpful, his friend then asked him, *We'll, where did you lose it?*

I lost it over there on the grass, Sam said.

Well, then, why are you looking for it here on the sidewalk?

Because that's where the light is!

In the church and in life, we can wear ourselves out trying to be Christ's hands and feet in the world. There's so much darkness in the world. There are so many people stuck in the darkness, unable for whatever reasons to rise above the clouds—to sort their lives out, get their lives organized and climb out of the basement of life's daily challenges.

So, what are we to do? What is the church to do? Always, the church and we who seek to be followers of Jesus—always—we're to approach every human being and every life-situation with compassion and with a caring heart.

But you know what? There are some situations—some people—who can't be fixed ... at least, not by us (maybe somebody else) and not today. Maybe next week or next year; we never know.

But most of the time, the best thing we can do, as the church and as people seeking to live a Christian life, is to **go where the light is**. Go with the situations, with the people where there's a glimmer of light ... of hope ... of possibility.

The truth is, we need to meet God half way. God and the church can't do it all by themselves. We have to do our part. And we CAN do it; because **we belong to the light**. That's who we are as children of God. As Christians, we're children of the light.

IV.

Did you know that the eagle knows that a storm is coming before the storm breaks? When a storm is brewing, the eagle will fly to some high spot and wait for the winds to come. And when the wind, signaling the storm, comes, the eagle will set its wings to that the wind will pick it up and lift it above the storm.

The eagle doesn't escape the storm; it simply rises above it. When the storm is raging below, the eagle is soaring above it.

The wind, for the eagle, is like the light for us. When the storm comes, the eagle gives itself to the wind and rises above it. With us, as people of faith, when darkness comes, we give ourselves to the light which overcomes the darkness.

Remember, it's not the burdens of life—the storms and the darkness—that weigh us down; it's how we handle them.

Friends, in all things, we need to go where the light is ... go where the wind can lift us above the chaos, the confusion ... where the light can illumine us and lead us out of the darkness. **We belong to the light**.

Working our way out of the economic quagmire we're in our is going to take time. Finding workable ways to make our banks functional again ...

- to restoring trust in our financial institutions ...
- building up confidence in potential investors ... restoring the trust ...
- and then making firm commitments to fixing education and health care; these are enormous challenges that lie before us.

In all of this, we have to go where the light is. Somewhere in all of this, there's light ... there's hope.

V.

Arise and shine, says the prophet Isaiah; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

What powerful words of hope! These words were spoken to the exiles who had returned to Judah and to the destroyed walls of Jerusalem during the period known as *the restoration*.

Talk about tough times! These were tough times. But God was on the move and the Spirit was rising up; but it was gradual and it wasn't easy. It took Israel decades to climb out of her post-exilic nightmare. These were tough times, indeed—way beyond the scope of what we're dealing with in our current recession or depression, or whatever it is.

Arise and shine; for your light has come. And then, the prophet goes on,

- *For darkness shall cover the earth ...*
- *And thick darkness the peoples ...*
- *But the Lord will arise upon you and his glory will appear over you. And—get this—nations shall come to your light ...*

Whoa! Imagine that! *People will come to your light.* Aren't we like that? Don't we prefer to be around positive people, people who exhibit a sense of optimism and hope about tomorrow? And why would that be? Because—again—that's who we are. People are drawn to the light. We can't help it because that's where love lives.

None of us here today is intended for darkness ... or for failure ... or for rejection. God can and will make something better out of whatever situation we're in. But again, we have to meet God half way.

Some years ago, the great Muhammed Ali was asked by a frustrated ghetto youth if it wouldn't be better for him to quit school and start a boxing career because his grades were always bad. Ali smiled at the young man and answered in his poetic way:

Listen up, he said: *Got to go to college to get the knowledge ...
And stay there til you're through ...
Cause if God can make penicillin out of moldy bread,
God can make something out of you.*

VI.

God calls us to the light. Every day, every hour, every moment, God calls us to the light. All this wallowing in darkness ... all the bickering in high places ... and the back-and-forth accusations ... and the petty attempts to divide us into good guys and bad guys; that's all SIN. It's the stuff of the world ... it's darkness seeking to overcome the light.

And I guarantee you, at the end of the day, it will fail. Why? Because it is NOT of God.

Lift up your eyes and look around, says the prophet. For all about you, the people are coming, coming to the brightness of your dawn.

For God so loved the world, says John, that God came to us in Jesus ...so that everyone who believed in him may have life ...and so that all of us may come to the light—the light that no darkness can overcome.

In the movie, ***The Shawshank Redemption***, a lifelong convict named Red keeps telling his fellow prisoner, Andy, to stop talking about hope since in prison, hope is a dangerous thing. It's better to live without hope than to be tormented by a hope that can never be realized.

But then, one day Andy barricades himself in the warden's office, flips on the Shawshank prison P.A. system, and plays a portion of a Mozart opera, bringing the entire prison to a standstill as each prisoner is suddenly listening to this incredible operatic music filling the prison hallways.

And even Red, who resisted all talk of hope, could not resist this glimpse of beauty.

I have no idea, said Red, what those two Italian ladies were singin' about. I like to think they were singing about something so beautiful it can't be expressed in words, and it makes your heart ache because of it.

But I can tell you this, those voices soared, higher and farther than anyone within these gray walls dares to dream. And for the briefest of moments, those walls seemed to dissolve and every last man at Shawshank was free.

Wow! We belong to the light, friends, for God so loved the world.

We belong to the truth ... for God so loved the world.

We belong to love ... for God so loved the world.

Lift up your eyes and look around. Hear the music and see the light ... and feel it ... and know it ... and claim as your own. For we are children of the light.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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