

Jesus: I AM the light of the world

Message for Sunday, July 28, 2013
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: John 8:12

Children's Message: from Matthew 5:14-16 ("You are the light of the world.")

Need: A mirror and a flashlight.

Have you ever sat outside on a bright sunny day and used a mirror to reflect the sun's light? If one of you will take this flashlight and shine it on me I will show you what I mean. You see, as he shines the light on me, I hold up my mirror and I can reflect the light to shine on you. I am not the light, I am just letting my mirror reflect the light to shine on you. If I am going to reflect the light on you, there are a couple of things that are very important. First, I must keep my mirror facing toward the light. If I turn away from the light, I cannot reflect the light. Second, I must make sure that nothing comes between the light and me. If that happens, I cannot reflect the light.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." He also said to his followers, "You are the light of the world." What that means to me is that we let Jesus' light shine through us. Let's say that Jesus is like that flashlight. We are like the mirror. So when we help people, we are showing the love of Jesus.

After the children have left, tell this to the congregation: There is an old saying in Brazil, perhaps borrowed from the Portuguese: "If you turn your back to the light, you'll see only your shadow."

Sermon: "Jesus: I AM the light of the world"

A little boy forgot his lines in a Sunday School presentation. His mother, sitting in the front row to prompt him, gestured and formed the words silently with her lips, but it didn't help. Her son's memory was blank. Finally she leaned forward and whispered the words, "I am the light of the world."

The child beamed proudly and with great feeling and a loud, clear voice said, "My mom is the light of the world."

Almost. Rather, it is Jesus who is the light of the world.

Light is one of the strangest things in the world. We depend on it every moment we are awake, yet no one fully understands it. Scientists say that a beam of light sometimes behaves like particles: that explains how sunlight is able to pass across the vacuum of space to

reach us on earth. But sometimes light behaves like waves: that explains how light is able to pass through solid objects, like these glass windows. Light is particle and wave — two characteristics that are completely different.

Jesus is God and Human — two characteristics that are completely different. Science is still struggling to understand light; the church is still struggling to understand Jesus.

That's OK. We don't have to have a scientific explanation for everything, whether it's light or God. Maybe these unsolved mysteries are good: they keep us humble. They remind us that there is a God whose ways are not our ways, and whose thoughts are not our thoughts.

What is it like to be in the dark? I mean real dark. I mean pitch black dark, where you can't see where you're walking, where you can't see your hand in front of your face.

Now if this happens when you're in a familiar place, it's no problem. You know where the candles are, where the matches are. It's very simple and soon you have light.

What if you're in a strange place? Somewhere you've never been before. Maybe you're lost in the woods, and the heavy clouds block all the light. Maybe you were exploring a deserted building and the power went off. And you don't have a flashlight or matches or any kind of light at all.

For most people, it is scary to be in the dark. Many people panic. It begins with wondering, "What's out there?" The wondering turns to nervousness, the nervousness builds to fear, and the fear grows to panic. But not the kind of panic where you run; after all, you can't see what you might bang into. It's the kind of panic that makes a person freeze.

Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." Jesus says, calm down! Let me just light this candle! And in the warm glow of the light, the first thing you will see is Jesus' face. You are not alone.

John 8:12, New International Version:

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

Sometimes the darkness in which we find ourselves is not physical darkness, but spiritual darkness. Or emotional darkness. Or financial darkness. Or other

kinds of darkness. You can't see what's coming, and you can't see where you're going. Maybe you don't even know where you're going — now that's darkness. And that's scary.

In that situation again, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Note what's interesting here. Jesus doesn't promise to show you the answer to your problems. Jesus doesn't promise to lead you to a place of safety where nothing can ever go wrong again. Listen again to what he says: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Our part is to follow Jesus.

He's not going to show you the way out. He *is* the way. He's not going to give you the answer to your problems. He *is* the answer. All he says is, "Follow me."

He's not going to fix everything for you. What he really wants to do is to fix *you*. "If you spent less time worrying about your problems and about yourself, and more time listening to me and obeying my teaching, you'd have a totally different outlook on life." Actually, he didn't say that. That's my paraphrase. Here's how Jesus did say it:

Matthew 6:31-33, New King James Version:
 [Jesus said,] "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Can you see the huge difference Jesus brings to our lives when we live his way? That's the result of living in the light, the light of life.

There's one more thing. Jesus says, "Good. Now that's you've settled that part, I want you to spread that light — my light glowing in you — to others.

Matthew 5:14-16, New Revised Standard Version:
 [Jesus said,] "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

How do we do that? "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works." It is through deeds of love and kindness that the gospel is spread.

Preacher Rick Warren put it this way, "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care."

Psychologist Gary Smalley tells a story about a young woman who experienced light breaking through the darkness of her life.

During the first day of an introductory speech class, the teacher was going around the room, having the students introduce themselves. Each student was to respond to the questions, "What do I like about myself?" and "What don't I like about myself?"

Nearly hiding at the back of the room was Dorothy. Her long, red hair hung down around her face, almost obscuring it from view. When it was Dorothy's turn to introduce herself, there was only silence in the room. Thinking perhaps she had not heard the question, the teacher moved his chair over near hers and gently repeated the question. Again, there was only silence.

Finally, with a deep sigh, Dorothy sat up in her chair, pulled back her hair, and in the process revealed her face. Covering nearly all of one side of her face was a large, irregularly shaped birthmark—nearly as red as her hair. "That," she said, "should show you what I don't like about myself."

Moved with compassion, this godly professor leaned over and gave her a hug. Then he kissed her on her cheek where the birthmark was and said, "That's OK, Honey, God and I still think you're beautiful."

Dorothy cried uncontrollably for almost twenty minutes When she finally could talk, as she dabbed the tears from her eyes she said to the professor, "I've wanted so much for someone to hug me and say what you said. Why couldn't my parents do that? My mother won't even touch my face."

(Gary Smalley and John Trent, *The Blessing*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1986, pp. 47-48).

Yes, your kindness to others, even just a few simple words, can bring the light and love of Jesus into someone's life.

Next Steps:

- Let Jesus be the light of your life. Follow him, live in his light.
- Reach out to someone with deeds of love and kindness. Let the light of Jesus shine in your life for others to see.

Pray about these things now. Some of you may be in darkness right now. Like I said, it could be emotional darkness, or physical or financial or spiritual, or relationships, something else. Let Jesus be your light.