

"Real Light"

Isaiah 61:1-4; 8-11 John 1:1-9 19-28 Ephesians 1:3-14

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH 6:1-4; 8-11

Isaiah announces his calling to proclaim the season of God's favor when the afflicted the disenfranchised, the oppressed, the tormented, the grieving, and the imprisoned shall be restored. These words are the words that one day will be given to Jesus to read in the synagogue. Upon finishing the reading Jesus will claim that these words describe himself and his mission. Hear the word of God from Isaiah 62:1-4; 8-11

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 1:1-9; 19-28

There's a story about a woman finding herself alone in an elevator with the famous Robert Redford. As the elevator moved up the floors, the woman, like many of us might, found herself uncontrollably staring at the movie star. Finally, in her excitement and nervousness, she blurted out: "Are you the real Robert Redford?" To which Redford responded, "Only when I'm alone."

That story reveals that Robert Redford has grown into a wisdom that must serve him well. For like John the Baptist, he obviously knows who he is not. 1

John the gospel writer describes John the Baptist in terms of who he is and who he is not. He is not the source of the light, but one who points to the real light Jesus. Hear the gospel of our Lord from John 1:1-9

Let's pray. Thank you Lord for lighting our world. We do our best with candles and electric lights, but you really came and sent the spiritual darkness on the run. Help us as we examine these words written about you by your closest friend John, to see how we can be participants in continuing to let your light shine. In Jesus' name we pray.

The five year old nephew of the bride was chosen to be in charge of carrying the rings down the aisle. At the wedding rehearsal he was unusually unruly. He kept leaping out at people, baring his teeth at and then chasing the flower girls. He growled and snarled as he practiced going down the aisle. Finally his mother pulled him aside and demanded to know why he was behaving so badly.

"But Mom," he explained, "I have to act fierce - I'm the 'Ring Bear.'"

Like so many of us that little boy misunderstood just what role he was supposed to play. He thought he was called to be big, imposing, fearsome, large and in charge. He thought he was to BE the "star of the show." He thought the spotlight was his.

But he wasn't supposed to BE a bear, he was supposed to be the "bear-er" of good things—of good rings. His role was important. The pastor, not to mention the bride and groom, needed those rings down front. But the focus of the wedding ceremony was not on the ring bearer. He was not the reason for the wedding celebration.

In this week's Advent gospel text John, the author of the fourth gospel, has no trouble distinguishing the one who "bears witness" to the light from the One who actually IS the light...John was the bearer of the news that the Light was coming...the real light; the light of the world.

You can sit in physics class and learn a lot of things about light. Ask Stephen Hawking, who holds the Newton chair at Cambridge. He will tell you that light is the ultimate constant in the universe, that it always travels at 186,000 miles per second, that light transmits energy, radiation, and information. Physics can tell us a great deal about light. But there's one thing physics has never explained, namely, what exactly do we mean by that word "light"? What is it? We know it when we see it, but we can't really explain what it is. Unlike space or time, light cannot be defined over against anything else. Light simply exists. 2

Light is one of those words that has more than one meaning. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world, meaning that he came into the world to bring light." But Jesus also said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light, meaning he came into our world to lighten our burdens."

Real light can mean a real light as opposed to artificial light. But it can also refer to something not being very heavy--it's real light. If someone is carefree we call them light-hearted. If someone is dizzy we call them light-headed. If someone is fast on their feet we call them light-footed.

When it comes to being around people, some are introverts and some are extroverts. When an introvert is at a party, his "lights are on." He can only take it being around a lot of people so long before his battery starts running down and he has to get home alone so he can recharge.

When an extrovert is home alone, her lights are on. She can only take so much time alone before her battery runs down and she's got to find a party somewhere.

That's how our emotional batteries work.

Our physical batteries work the same way. Our bodies need to be recharged at regular intervals. It's called sleep. Physically, we need time to recharge. That's why God has in his infinite wisdom given us the rhythm of night and day.

In a manger in Bethlehem God again said, "Let there be light!" and the real light came into the world. That real light is the source of our spiritual life, and our source for recharging our spiritual batteries.

When the real light of Jesus came into our world that was when the word became more than words, when the word became fleshed out, when meat came on the bones of prophecy, and the prophesy came to life.

Steve Martin once had a comedy bit about the French language. He was illustrating how the French called a hat a chapeau and how they called a shirt a chemise, until finally in frustration he threw up his hands and said, "These French, they have a different word for everything!"

The Greeks not only had different words for everything they had different words for the same word. Instead of using adjectives to delineate the differences between the uses of a word, they just used different words. You may have heard that they used 3 different words for our English word love: eros, phileos and agape. Well they also use three words for our English word life.

They had the word "Psyche" to refer to the breath or physical life designated by breathing. They used the word "Bios" refers to the period of life span. They used the word, "Zoe" to refer to the spiritual life.

Zoe is the word used here to refer to the life that was in Jesus Christ the Word. In Jesus was the Zoe, the spiritual life, and that a quality of life was the light of all people. That kind of life was what enabled men and women to see their sin and to see their way to forgiveness for their sin in Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

All humans have a Psyche,-- the breath of life.

All humans have a bios,-- a life span. God's intent for all humans is that they also have the "zoe," the spiritual life that was in Jesus that is the real light of men, women, boys and girls.

God desires that we humans become more than just breathing entities carrying out biological functions for a limited life span. God desires that we become spiritually alive, that we become spiritually awake. Our bios, our physical life span is limited.

Yesterday we celebrated the bios of Brenda Odell's mother. Her bios lasted 91 years 7 months and 5 days. As followers of Jesus we believe her Zoe lives on.

Being born is a miracle. It is something that the one being born has no control over. Being born is something someone else initiates. I was not consulted in the decision as to whether or not I would be born.

In the same way, v 13 makes the point that becoming a child of God is not something we can do or make happen. It is God's decision and God's action that makes it take place.

Spiritual birth is initiated by God. Just as Jesus was born physically as a result of the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary, so also we are born spiritually at God's initiative through his Holy Spirit.

Our bios is a vehicle to allow us the opportunity for God to conceive us spiritually: to make us children of God. Our physical life is just the foreshadowing for the real life, the Zoe

that comes to us in Jesus, and will be in and with us for eternity.

Each of us comes into this world with a physical body. Some of us have all of our parts and they all work, and some don't. Some of us have bodies that work better than others. There is only one Jose Altuve all 5 foot 6 inches of him.

But to all those who receive Jesus, God gives the power to become more than breathing bodies with term limits to the number of days that we breathe. All who receive Jesus can become children of God. To them God bestows the Zoe, the kind of life that is eternal, spiritual. That life is the real life that is the real light of men and women, boys and girls everywhere.

One summer I was leading the singing for our elementary age children at a Vacation Bible School. We were singing "This little Light of mine". The second verse of that song goes, "Hide it under a bushel, No!" I'm gonna let it shine." Well, one of the kids sang, "hide it under a bushel? YES! I'm not gonna let it shine!"

What began with one little boy spread until almost all the little boys were singing, "Hide it under a bushel YES! I'm Not gonna let it shine!". Of course it was a joke, a good natured case of song parody, but it occurred to me that many times it is all too true.

There used to be a burger commercial that was designed to make fun of folks who ate Kentucky Fried Chicken. It pictured a typical American family sitting down to Sunday lunch with KFC buckets on their heads. The tag line read "Don't be a bucket head!" Too many times we are bucket heads! We hide our light under a bushel yes! We are disobedient like Israel and are not a light to our neighborhood, much less the nations.

While it is true that this world came into being at God's initiative, and that we become children of God at God's initiative, we have an initiative when it comes to reflecting the light that has been shone upon and within us. We haven't been made God's children for nothing! God has a great plan for us. God has a great plan for us and that plan is not that we hide our light under a bucket.

It doesn't take too many newscasts or too many glances over the headlines to realize that darkness is still with us. Just as those to whom Jesus came rejected him, so are there folks today what have a darkness preference—who prefer darkness. But John assures us that even though the darkness is present, it is not victorious. The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not overcome it.

On July 23, 2002, nine miners in Western Pennsylvania became trapped in a flooded mine. The injured and desperate men tied themselves together so that the stronger ones could sustain the weaker ones as they waited to be rescued. Journalists from across the nation reported the rescue effort, which took five long days. No one could believe it when all nine miners emerged safely from the mine.

On July 30, 2002 the people of the small mining community gathered for a worship service to thank God for saving the miners' lives. At the ceremony, there were ten miners' lamps set up on the altar, even though there were only nine miners. According to the pastor who presided over the worship celebration, the tenth lamp represented God's presence, which the miners claimed they could feel as they waited to be rescued. It was this "10th Man" they honored as they read Psalm 103: "Praise the Lord . . . Who redeems your life from the pit." 3

Even when there was no light in the darkness of a mine, there was the "real light" of the world sustaining them until they could once again see the light.

On December 16, 2017 some of us had the opportunity to reflect the real light of Jesus' to 23 families who came to our driveway to receive bags of groceries for Christmas. We were able to do that because some of you bought and brought the groceries for us to distribute. I decided I would greet each family by singing carols to them as they drove up. I was getting warmed up for caroling tonight. I gave each family two brochures about our church and invited them to come and worship with us any Sunday morning. I specifically invited them to come to our Candlelight Christmas Eve service. Whether they come to get a sample of real light on Sundays, with the bags of groceries and frozen turkeys they got a sample of real light on a Saturday morning.

In the same way we are all challenged to go light our world. Let the Zoe, the life that was in Jesus, shine on you and bounce off you on to others. Keep your eyes open for those who are lonely, who are in need, who are in darkness, who haven't got a clue. They may not be trapped in a mine but they still may be "walking in darkness." Light your world with the real light. Sing your song. Love your neighbor. Love your enemy. We may not find ourselves in an elevator with the Real Robert Redford, but we all can find ourselves in this world reflecting the . . . real light of Jesus.

Let us pray, Dear Lord, we see the light. We are crawling toward it. We feel lighter because you have come into our world. Help us to point the way for others. Help us to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. In the same way that we put lights on trees and bring them inside the house and lights on our roofline to let people know we know you... may your light shine from our faces wherever we go to make you known. There are people still walking in darkness that need to see a great light. There are still people who are weighed down with heavy burdens that we might lighten as we share You with them. Hear now our prayers for folks like that.

1 ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., Finding Our Voice, by Mary Lynn Tobin

2 CSS Publishing Company, Praying for a Whole New World, by William G. Carter

3 ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., ChristianGlobe Illustrations, by King Duncan