

March 17, 2019

I Am

I Am the Light of the World

John 9:1-7

Opening words: The Gospel of John is preoccupied with the deity of Jesus. Chapter one sets the tone for the rest of the book. In that chapter, John declares Jesus, the Word, to be God, and goes on to say, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." He announces that in Jesus, the glory of God has been seen, and he further speaks of Jesus as the One who has made the invisible God known. And then, we have the multiple "I Am" sayings scattered throughout John's gospel. The title "I Am" is the divine name revealed to Moses by the Lord in Exodus 3:14 from the burning bush. By taking on this name, Jesus claimed to be God! The "I Am" sayings not only speak of Jesus' identity, but each of the seven "I Am" sayings reveal an aspect of Jesus' mission.

During the season of Lent, I am looking at Jesus' "I Am" statements. Each one is rich in divine truth. I began this sermon series on Ash Wednesday. On that night, I looked at the original "I Am" saying in Exodus 3. Last week, we looked at Jesus's statement, "I am the bread of life". It was a statement about eternal satisfaction. In today's statement, "I am the light of the world", the Master is speaking of eternal hope. Our Gospel reading for this morning is John 9:1-7. Let me call this message *I Am the Light of the World*.

John 9:1-7 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷ "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) was an American Baptist preacher and the face of the civil rights movement from 1954 until his death in 1968. He once said, "*Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.*" I have always liked that quote. If you can agree with that quote, say, "**Amen!**" That takes us to this morning's Gospel lesson.

We find ourselves today in the ninth chapter of John. According to the text, Jesus came upon a man who had been blind since birth. He had only known darkness. He must have been a familiar character. The disciples recognized him, and they knew his story. They asked Jesus the question every generation has asked: Why do good people have

to suffer? In their generation, it was a common belief that sin caused suffering. The man was suffering, so who sinned? Did the blind man sin in the womb, causing his suffering? (They believed the unborn could sin.) Or, did the blind man's parents cause his suffering? They waited for Jesus's answer, but it never came. Instead, Jesus exposes a bigger issue. Jesus begins to speak of his own Messiahship. The scene is crude. Jesus spat on the ground and made mud from his own saliva. He took that mud and rubbed it into the man's eyes. (I wouldn't recommend this practice at home. I am sure it is not endorsed by the American Medical Association.) Then, Jesus instructs the man to go and wash his eyes in a near-by pool. When he did, the man could suddenly see, for the first time in his life. His dark days were over. There are two things you need to know. First, of all the miracles Jesus performed, restoring someone's sight was the most popular. Second, giving sight to the blind was a sign of Messiahship. In verse five he says it clearly, *I am the light of the world*. The darkness of this man's life was relieved by the light of Jesus. Without Jesus, the man would have lived the rest of his life hopeless and in the dark. With Jesus, there is always hope.

In many ways we play the part of the blind man. There is a surplus of darkness in our world. I am not just talking about complex international issues, like North Korea, poverty, or climate change. I am not talking about our complex national problems, like racism, healthcare, or Washington DC. I am talking about the darkness in our personal lives. They remind us of a simple truth. Life is hard! You know it is true. You don't have to be a minister listening to the hard lives of the people within this church. You have ears; just listen to the sad stories of the people in your life. How many people do you know right now that are dealing with a health problem? It isn't just cancer. Every day we seem to be introduced to a new disease and condition. Sometimes there is a cure and sometimes there is not. Sometimes our health problems lead to financial problems. The number one reason people declare bankruptcy is unpaid medical bills. How many people do you know who are struggling with their personal finances? There just doesn't seem to be enough money. How many people do you know who are struggling with a broken relationship? Your brother lives a mile away, but you feel a million miles apart. You haven't spoken to him in years. How many lonely people do you know? I could go on, but I won't. You get the point. Life is hard! In many ways we are like the blind man sitting on the side of the road with dead eyes. We are living in the dark with no hope of relief. When Jesus says, "I am the light of the world," we listen because we are tired of living in the dark without hope.

It was last Saturday night. I came back to the church to lock up. The birthday party for the one-year-old was over, and the family was finished cleaning up. For a few minutes, I stood in the fellowship hall and talked to the family. They were both excited and tired. When the moment came to say good-bye, the mother walked to the light switch and said, "Russ, do you want me to turn the lights off?" I said, "Sure!" The baby's grandmother said, "Russ has been here so long he can find his way in the dark." When the lights went off, they left, and I maneuvered in the dark. I headed to the kitchen. When I got to the kitchen, I made a right hand turn and headed toward my office. The

problem is, I turned too sharp, and I hit my thigh on the counter. I won't show it to you, but I have a bruise on my thigh. It is not fatal, but I wished I had turned the light on. It is much easier to maneuver in the light! If you agree light is important, say, **"Amen!"** Jesus is the light of the world and that light always brings hope.

There is a Christian blog by the name of *Unlocking the Bible*. It is written by a woman named Kristen Wetherell. On October 14, 2014, she posted an article called *Five Reasons You Should have Hope*. The five reasons are found in Psalm 130. I would encourage you to claim Psalm 130 the next time you are in a dark place. I think the five reasons have some merit. Each one is enhanced by the light of the world, Jesus. This is the first one.

Always have hope because God hears you! Psalm 130:1-2 says, *"Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy."* In the seventeenth chapter of Matthew (Matthew 17:14-18) there is another healing story. Jesus healed a boy from violent seizures. The seizures were so violent the boy had fallen into fires and water. What always grabs me about that story is the boy's father. The man fought through a big crowd to get to Jesus. However, that also means Jesus heard the father through the great crowd. That is important for one reason. Our world is calling out to God for help, but God hears our individual prayers. God can isolate the individual voice in the crowd of desperate voices. Always have hope, because God hears you! Jesus is the light of the world. If you are thankful God hears you, say, **"Amen!"**

Always have hope because God has mercy on you. Psalm 130:3-4 says, *"If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, therefor you are revered."* In the seventh and eighth chapters of John, there is the story of the adulterous woman (John 7:53-8:11). You know the story. It is early in the morning and Jesus is teaching the people who had gathered. Suddenly, the teachers of the law appeared with a sinner. No one questions the fact she is guilty of adultery. She is alone; there is no mention of her partner. The teachers use the woman to trap Jesus with his own words, but Jesus saw through the scheme. The crowd is ready to stone the woman, but it never happens. The Master reminded the crowd they were all sinners. In the end, it is just Jesus and the woman. Jesus looks at the woman and challenges her to live a better life. Jesus didn't belittle the woman; he had compassion on the woman. God does not look at your past mistakes, he looks at your future potential. God treats us in our darkest hour with mercy. Always have hope, because God has mercy on you! Jesus is the light of the world. If you are thankful God is merciful, say, **"Amen!"**

Always have hope because God speaks to you. Psalm 130:5 says, *"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word, I put my hope."* In the sixteenth chapter of Luke, there is the story of the rich man and Lazarus. You know the story. In this world the rich man had everything, and the poor man, Lazarus, had nothing. In death, their roles

are reversed. The rich man is in hell and he wants to spare his loved ones the same fate. He suggests Lazarus return to earth to warn them. Abraham refuses and says, they have the Bible and the Bible is enough. We have the Bible and the Bible is enough. In your darkest hour, cling to your Bible. It has a way of satisfying your parched soul. Always have hope because God speaks to you. Jesus is the light of the world. If you are thankful for the Bible, say, **"Amen!"**

Always have hope because God will return to you. Psalm 130:6 says, *"My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning."* In the fourteenth chapter of John, the disciples are wrestling with the fact that Jesus is going to be leaving them (John 14:1-4). Everyone in every generation hates change. The disciples hated the fact their lives were going to change once Jesus was gone. They were upset and Jesus tried to comfort them. Do you remember what Jesus said to comfort them? Jesus speaks of heaven and tells the disciples that he will return for them. The Second Coming of Christ is one of Jesus' great promises. Always have hope, because Jesus will return. Jesus is the light of the world. If you are looking forward to Jesus' return, say, **"Amen!"**

Always have hope because God will finish the work God began in you. Psalm 130:7-8 says, *"O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is unfailing love and with him there is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins."* The twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew is the home of my favorite parable, the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46). It is a judgement parable. People who ignore human suffering will go to hell. People who respond to human suffering will go to heaven. Are you a sheep or a goat? Are you striving to be a better person, or are you content with your present state? It is Wesleyan to the core. Never be satisfied. We are striving for perfection. Always have hope, because God will finish the work God began in you. Jesus is the light of the world. If you promise to keep laboring for Jesus, say, **"Amen!"** Just ask the blind man and he will tell you, there is always hope with Jesus, the light of the world.

The other day, I officiated at a funeral for a man named Billy. He did not have a church home, so I was called. Everyone told me he was a great guy. He was just beginning a new chapter in his life. He was sixty-six years old, and he had just retired. He and his wife decided to move to Florida to escape the Ohio winters. They bought a house in the sunshine state and were excited about their new adventure. She went down a few weeks earlier to set up their home. He stayed behind to wrap up some details. When everything was done, he bought a ticket to Florida to reunite with his wife. As he waited for his flight at the Canton-Akron Regional Airport, the unthinkable happened. He had a heart attack and was gone before he hit the floor. When his wife, Holly, got the news, she was shocked and hid in bed for four days. She had excellent vision, but on that day, she was a blind woman, living in darkness. On the night before the funeral, I sat with her next to her husband's casket. There is no other way to say it. She was a broken person, groping for survival in this dark world. I offered to pray with her, and

she accepted. When I was done praying, there was both a smile on her face and tears in her eyes. She wiped away the tears and said to me, "Thank you. Everything is going to be fine. I can do this now." It wasn't the words of my prayer that made the difference. It was the light of Jesus. With Jesus, there is always hope.

In the darkest moments in your life, don't forget the truth. God cares for you. Martin Luther King Jr. wasn't wrong. He once said, "*Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.*" Jesus is the light of the world. That is a good thing, because our world can be a dark place. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"