

December 27, 2020

First Sunday after Christmas

Let There Be Light!

John 1:1-14

**Opening words:** I love this old preaching story. A tightfisted old farmer, who lived before electricity, was taking his hired man to task for carrying a lighted lantern when he went to call on his best girl. "Why," he exclaimed, "when I went a-courtin' I never carried one of them things. I always went in the dark." "Yes," the hired man said wryly, "and look what you got!" I tell you that simply story for a simple reason. Light is important.

The scientific world tells us light is important for five reasons. Let me list them for you.

1. Light helps us see.
2. Light helps plants make food.
3. Light helps people stay warm.
4. Light is important in the sterilization process.
5. Light provides a great amount of energy.

The spiritual world light is important as well. The answer is obvious. In John 8:12, Jesus call himself the light of the world. Without him your spiritual growth is impossible. Let me call this message *Let There Be Light!* Our Gospel reading is John 1:1-14.

**John 1:1-14** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. 6 There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. 9 The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This morning we are instructed from the spiritual gospel, John. It was written about the year AD 60 by the apostle that carries its name. John's purpose for writing this gospel was to introduce the Christian message to the Greek thinking world. The other three gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, were written to the Hebrew world. For that reason, this gospel stands alone. The Greek world clearly understood our Gospel lesson. They

understood that the light of which John spoke was God. In other words, God, literally, came into the world to illuminate her dark places. That is the Good News of Christmas!

This is no shortage of darkness in our world. There seems to be a surplus of darkness in our world. I do not remember a time in my life when there seems to be so many complex problems. Maybe the reason is I am a pastor and I talk about other people's problems regularly or maybe the reason is our world has drifted off course. Our country seems to be groping in the dark when it comes to the Coronavirus. Approximately 19 million have gotten the Coronavirus. Approximately 322,000 have died from the virus. Our country is groping in the dark racially. After all the talk of unity, we are still a divided people. Our country is groping in the dark sexually. Everyone has a firm opinion. It appears the United Methodist Church will divide over his topic in the next few months. Our country is groping in the dark economically. On the one hand, Wall Street is near an all-time high. On the other hand, many are struggling to obtain the basics. Did you know the unemployment rate in Ohio is 5.2%? Did you know the unemployment rate in Mahoning County and Trumbull County is 6.6%? has an unemployment rate of 6.6%? That figure is the highest in the state of Ohio. Help from Washington has stalled. Did you know our national debt is \$27.5 trillion? Our country is groping in the dark when it comes to dealing with our national health care crisis. I do not know anyone who does not want everyone to have hospitalization. The problems are what will it cost and what will be covered? Our country seems to be groping in the dark internationally. Does anyone trust Iran or North Korea? I could go on, but I will not. It is all so depressing. We are groping in the dark at so many levels. Are you tired of all the darkness in our world?

This is the problem. God do not launch a program designed for international reform on Christmas. God seems to be more interested in eternity, than our temporary problems. God decided to reform the world one soul at a time. How reformed are you? How has Jesus, the light of the world, reformed you. American televangelist John Hagee (Born 1940) once said, "*The fundamental principle of Christianity is to be what God is, and he is light.*" It happened in three different ways.

**Jesus came to illuminate our dark past.** Without Jesus there is no forgiveness. One of the great misdemeanors in America today is that you can earn your salvation. That is why volunteerism and caring for your community has become the rage. I have nothing against volunteerism or community spirit, but they will not get you into heaven. We are saved by grace and by grace alone. Never belittle the death of Jesus on the cross. His blood washed away your sins. His death made it possible for you to live. Forgiveness is a beautiful thing. When you forgive others, you are telling God you are thankful that you are forgiven.

In October 2006, the country was shocked by another school shooting. This time the shooting was extremely cruel. It happened in Nickels Mines, Pennsylvania, in a one room old order Amish schoolhouse. The shooter was a man by the name of Charles

Roberts. Before taking his own life, he shot eight of the ten girls, killing five. The only light in this dark story was the reaction of the Amish community. Within hours of the shootings, the Amish showed up at the door of Robert's widow. They did not show up demanding revenge. They showed up to offer her comfort and support. How can you question the faith of these people? Can anyone question your faith? How easy is it for you to forgive, as you have been forgiven? And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Jesus came to illuminate our dark past.

**Jesus came to illuminate our dark present.** In other words, Jesus told us how to live. The world tells the key to a happy life is making yourself the star of your life. You do that by accumulating possessions and getting a surplus of attention. There is a certain amount of logic to that philosophy. The only problem is it does not work. Michael Jackson, Elvis Presley, Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain had more money and fame than they could handle. Do you consider their lives to be happy lives? Jesus said the key to living a happy life is making someone else the star in your life. I know we need a certain amount of money to survive and I know we all need a certain amount of attention. I know that Jesus' key to a happy life does not make logical sense, but it is true. Research tells us that people who serve others live longer happier lives.

Years ago, the Salvation Army was holding their international convention. They wanted their founder, Gen. William Booth (1829-1912), to be their keynote speaker. The problem was Booth was old and weak. He could not speak because he could not go. So, he wired the convention his speech. It was one word! The one word: "OTHERS." Do you wish you could hear a one-word sermon? Jesus came to illuminate our dark past. Jesus came to illuminate our dark present. If you get the point say, "**Amen!**"

**Jesus came to illuminate our dark future.** Without Jesus there is no hope of heaven. During this calendar year, I have officiated at 34 funerals. They have all been different, but they end the same way. I ended each one of those services with these words. Perhaps, you remember them from your sad day. Jesus was born in the normal way, but he lived an extraordinary life. He never committed a single sin, which made him the perfect sacrifice. He was executed Roman style and his body was placed in a tomb. His loved ones grieved for him. That all happened on a Friday. No one knew what would happen later that weekend. Jesus returned from the dead. That resurrection changed everything. Without the resurrection of Jesus, there is no hope of eternal life. However, with the resurrection of Jesus we have hope of eternal life. Who is the first person you want to see when you get to heaven? If you are thankful you are going to heaven say, "**Amen!**" Jesus came to illuminate our dark past. Jesus came to illuminate our dark present. Jesus came to illuminate your dark future.

For 51 years, Bob Edens was blind. That is a long to be living in the dark, trying to experience our world with just sounds and smells. Then it happened. A skilled surgeon performed a complicated operation, and, for the first time, Bob Edens had sight. Can you imagine? He was overwhelmed. He said, "I never would have dreamed that yellow

is so...yellow. Red is so red. Purple is so purple." he exclaimed. "I can see the shape of the moon and the vapor trail of a jet." He said, "At night, I love to look at the light of the stars." How many people do you know are blind?

How many people do you know are spiritually blind? Optometrists tell us that light is required to see. Your eyes can work perfectly, but without light you cannot see a thing! The brightest light that has ever shined is Jesus, God incarnate. How bright is Christ's light? It is bright enough to illuminate your dark past. There is forgiveness in Christ. It is bright enough to illuminate your dark present. The key to a happier more content life is serving others. It is bright enough to illuminate your dark future. Someday all of us of faith are going to heaven. Do you remember the quote from John Hagee? He once said, "*The fundamental principle of Christianity is to be what God is, and he is light.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"