

Christmas Day Sunday Sermon, December 25, 2016

Sermon Text: John 1: 1-14

Sermon Theme: Jesus is the light that lights our Christmas.

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.

When I was little, I can remember staring at the Christmas tree. It wasn't just the tree that I liked, it was the lights. My family had a tradition of setting up a Christmas village that had all sorts of little houses with different colored windows in it that the lights would twinkle through. I would sit for hours next to that Christmas village and make up little stories in my mind about the people in those houses and the Christmas things that they were doing. Many nights I would sit in front of those as the snow was falling outside.

I still like to sit by the tree and look at the lights after every one has gone to bed and I have a quiet moment. But, these lights are there for more than a nice show.

Every Christmas my grandmother and grandfather would explain to us that the lights were more than a decoration on the tree. All of those lights on the tree led up to the star at the top of the tree reminding us that the light of the world our Savior, Jesus has come. They showed us that Jesus is the light that lights our Christmas.

Many of us don't like to be in the dark. We are even afraid of it. A fear of the dark is one of those things that horror movies use against us. The bad guy waits in the dark or the scary monster jumps out of the dark and scares us. Children are often afraid of the dark and even as adults we may get uneasy when we're in a dark place. One of the most downloaded apps for smart phones are flashlights so that we can see in the dark. We don't like to be in the dark.

On the other hand, light is a wonderful thing. Many of us choose to drive only when it is light outside. Most of us choose to do most of our activities when it is light outside. We notice when the sun is not shining so brightly. We turn the lights on in our houses when it is dark outside and many of us sleep with a night light on. We like the light.

In our sermon text John talks about light and darkness. This light is much better than the light that lights our houses and the darkness is much scarier and deadly than the night on earth. **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.

Darkness and light are often used in the Bible to describe the difference between sin and God's grace, death and hell and salvation. Sin is described as being hopelessly lost in darkness with no way out and no one to help us. When I was a teacher, I took my students to some caverns in Northern California. When we were deep in the cave the guide turned off the lights and told us a story. He told us that there were several fraternities and organization who would bring their new members into the caverns for an initiation. They would then leave them there, in total darkness, without lights, and tell them to find their way out.

The people would stumble around for a long time, bumping into one another until panic set in because they could not find their way out. When the guide said this he didn't say anything for 2 minutes.

Those 2 minutes were a very long 2 minutes. It was pitch black, you could not see your hand in front of your face. No one but the guide had a flashlight. Some of the students began to panic a bit, even the adults were on the edge of nervousness. Then the guide turned back on the lights and we were all relieved.

The fear we had, even in those 2 minutes, was the same fear as the new members. We knew we were hopelessly lost. There was no way we would ever be able to find our way out of the caverns without a light. We knew that we would wander around bumping into one thing after another, probably dying deep within the mountain.

Living in sin is pictured in the same way: we are lost in darkness and have no hope of rescue on our own. We see darkness and hopelessness all around us don't we? We see people who fear death because they don't know what will happen after they die. We see people who make such poor decisions in life because they think they have it all figured out, they do not need help or guidance from God. Without faith in Jesus, we are really just wandering around this earth in darkness, bumping from one thing to another, hoping that just maybe we might find the light that will help us.

John tells us that Jesus is the light that lights our lives. Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness, but although he shines to rescue the lost many have not understood him and what he brings. John says: 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.**

Many of us notice that Christmas had gone very commercial. We have Season's Greetings, Merry Xmas and Happy Holidays instead of Merry Christmas. Many cities cannot put up a star on top of their Christmas Trees or set up a nativity scene. The push for sales and gifts, overshadows the blessing of the gift that came on that first Christmas. These are merely symptoms of the greater spiritual disease. This disease of missing our Savior did not start recently, it goes all the way back to Jesus.

Jesus did not come as a king who would make force people to bow before him. He did not come as a proud Pharisee who would guilt people into believing something. Jesus was born in a humble manger, in a humble stable, to humble parents. He came as a humble teacher offering to people the truth of salvation. What was the people's response? Although the light of the world was offering rescue and release from the prison of sin, Jesus own people, who were looking for the Messiah, did not believe in him as the Messiah.

There is really no difference today. So often we do not receive our Savior with joy and celebration, we receive him with a lack of joy. We do not take the opportunity to be in the Lord's house, instead we find reasons to do other things. We grudgingly come to the Lord's house on Christmas and Easter, and maybe a handful of other times throughout the year and we feel we have done our duty to God because we have taken time out of our busy schedule to be in his house. We give expensive gifts to ourselves and to our families, we buy cars that are ridiculously expensive, we may even pat ourselves on the back when we put money in the bucket outside of a store, but we have to wrestle a dollar or 10 out of our wallet to give to the Lord. When was the last time we gave as freely to the Lord as we give to ourselves? When was the last time our world truly had Christ in the center of it and not me, myself and I? When was the last time we looked to the light for the hope he brings, instead of wandering around in the darkness doing things our own way?

John tells us that Jesus is the light for our lives because he has come to save us from our sins, even the ones where we do not welcome our Savior as we should. **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.** 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 baby in a manger is much more than a baby. This baby is the Son of God, God made man come to earth. The same God that created the earth was coming to earth and his purpose was made clear by the prophets and the words of the angel to Joseph. **You are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.** This baby gives us reason for joy because he is the salvation of everyone who believes, Jesus is the light that lights our Christmas.

Jesus is the light that shines through the darkness of our sin. He is the one who rescues us from death and hell where sin leads. In place of death and hell, he offers us a gift that no one else can offer. 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.**

The reason Jesus is the light of Christmas is shown to us at the cross. When Jesus went to the cross of Calvary he went there to take away the sins of the world, that includes yours and mine. On the cross he suffered in our place. He was pierced because of our transgression, he was crushed because of our sins, the punishment that should have been ours he took, and by his suffering and death we are healed, we are made holy. Through his blood we are washed clean of our sins, we are forgiven and made children of God and heirs of eternal life.

It would have been foolish for those young men in the caves to refuse to use the lights to get out of the cave, just as it would have been foolish for our group to try to get out of the cave without the guide turning on the lights. It is more foolish for us to try to make it through this life on our own without the blessing of the light of salvation lighting the way to heaven.

As we look at the lights on the tree today and tonight, take a moment to turn off all of the distractions. Turn off the TV, phone, radio and look at the lights that point to the light of the world. Take a moment to think about the darkness of sin that was crushed by the power of the light of the world as it hung on the cross. Don't just see in the manger a baby, see your salvation in the manger. This is the light of the world, who was born to save you and me. **Amen**