

Sermon: See the Light

Silvia Purdie, Cashmere, 13 August 2017

Verses John 1:1-9 _____ John 6:40, 46 _____ John 8:12 _____ John 12:35-46

How many Real Men does it take to change a lightbulb?

None. Real men are not afraid of the dark.

How many Theoretical Physicists does it take to change a lightbulb?

Two. One to hold the lightbulb and the other to rotate the universe!

Q: How many city planners does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Six - four to write an extensive study recommending a three-way 100/200/250 watt light bulb, one to write an press release for the paper praising the study, and one to put in a 10 watt bulb instead.

How many introverts does it take to change a lightbulb?

Really? Does it have to be a group activity?

Q: How many bureaucrats does it take to change a lightbulb?

A: Two: one to screw it in and one to screw it up.

Q: How many Parish Council meetings does it take to change a lightbulb?

A: This topic was resumed from Matters Arising from last month's minutes, but is incomplete pending resolution our financial report, so it will be deferred to next month's agenda.

So, we are doing a series on the gospel of John. When I began, a couple of weeks ago, I said that the problem with reading John is not that it is difficult, but that it seems so easy. Verses like "I am the light of the world" or "be people of the light" are easy to translate into any language on earth. But what does it mean? My hunch is that the problem with such wonderfully simple words is that they can mean pretty much anything you want them to mean. Every religion on earth claims to bring people into the light, promises enlightenment. What is distinctive about what John is claiming?

The simplicity of his language teases out some complex ideas.

Here's one place to start: No one can see God.

Jesus says this in 6:45

"No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father."

God is invisible. How can you see what is invisible?

Or, in a Jewish perspective, it might be more accurate to say that no one has survived the experience of seeing God face to face. The glory of God is not so much invisible as it is overpowering, and we are shielded from seeing God for our own wellbeing.

But this is the claim John is making about Jesus – that Jesus has seen the Father. Jesus came from God, as the Nicene creed states – I believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God, Light of light, very God of very God, of one being with the Father.

That's the first claim, then, that Jesus has seen God,

and the second is equally astonishing – that Jesus shows us God

This is what Jesus claims over and over in John's Gospel: If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.

And over and over again in John people make the choice – will they truly see Jesus or will they close their eyes to him? This is our reading today from Chapter 12. John quotes the prophet Isaiah. Your eyes are shut. Your mind is closed. It's all happening right in front of you and you're missing it.

And interesting did you notice in verse 36 Jesus demonstrates in real time what he's talking about. He leaves them and hides away so they can't find him, can't see him.

Again and again people choose the darkness. They choose not to see and believe in Jesus. – so he is hidden from them.

But those who do see him and open their heart to him, to them he says "I have shown you the Father. In me you have seen God!"

This is the most outrageous claim.

And here's my question – what was it about Jesus that showed people God? In what way specifically was he the light of the world? If you had been there and met him 2000 years ago, what might you have noticed about him?

He was just a normal looking guy. Not particularly good looking. Not blond and blue eyed. He didn't actually glow. How did he show the light of God?

Was it the words he spoke about the truth of God?

Was it the actions he did, miracles, healings, breaking rules?

Do you imagine it in his eyes? In the charisma of his being?

Yes to all of these for me, but particularly, surely, if one thing in particular it must have been in his ability to love

Surely, what we read in the gospels is how each person experienced in the man Jesus an utterly unique depth of love, that in even a brief moment could touch them in a radical life-changing way.

Or not. Jesus had no magical power over people. Each person in the gospel is entirely free to say yes or no to this love.

For those who said yes the experience of Jesus was like a light turning on inside. Maybe Jesus is the ultimate light-bulb changer!

For those who said no I guess the light was too intense, too threatening, dangerous. Safer to stay in the dark.

Light or dark, open or closed, believing or not believing, seeing or not seeing

These are the simple words that make up the gospel of John. As you read it, you'll notice the way these simplest of words layer up, connect with other words like knowing and being known, life and death, glory, truth.

For now, some questions for us here today

If the risen Christ is alive through his Spirit, shining light into every corner of the world, how do you see him?

When do you catch a glimpse of the Light of Light, shining through everyday things? everyday faces?

When do you turn away from the light? What blocks the light for you?

I invite you in this moment of silence to say yes again to Christ, the Light of the world.

Come, loving God. Open our eyes that we may see.

Open our minds that we may believe more whole-heartedly

Open our lives that we too might shine with your light
and show your love in our eyes and in our lives.