

Community Church of Issaquah

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## Finding Light in a Very Dark World

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Not being very much of an internet expert, I don't really spend a great deal of time in search mode except to Google for assistance with Bible Study. One application I do like is called YouTube. It offers a great deal of posting on every subject in the book, but the one I enjoy is the most is the one that shares hymns. It was there one night several months ago that the hymn we sang this morning, "Christ, Be Our Light" popped up. When I clicked on it and listened while I also was reading the words, I was so touched with the message it offered. When I read more about the woman who wrote this hymn, I was enormously impressed. Bernadette Farrell is a contemporary hymn writer living in England. Her music and lyrics are always her own and have messages that resonate with us today. This hymn is now one that I play on YouTube often. It is the basis of the message this morning, our attempt to find light in a dark world.

I must say that one line in the hymn seems to echo in my head. You and I heard it when we sang the chorus. It's the last line there that says, "Shine in your church gathered today." That's us – you and me. As we are gathered here today, as we sing that hymn, as we read God's word, and as we have a message about what it means for Christ to be the Light, our plea to the Lord is that the Light of Christ be here right now. But what does it mean when Jesus said he was the Light of the world? That is the basis of our search today.

First, we must understand that when Jesus spoke those words we read in John, "I am the light of the world," the world at that time was in a very

dark place. Israelites being under the rule and persecution of the Roman Empire, no sense of freedom, and the absence of hope made for a sense of darkness. Then along came Jesus telling the people that he indeed was the Promised Messiah, the Son of God. His presence was to bring light to a very dark place, to restore hope and to give a new sense of there being the possibility for a better future. Jesus was that light. That was his mission, that was his message, that was his life. When those who heard him and chose to believe his message, they began to feel as if there was, as we say today, “Light at the end of the tunnel.”

In our society today, there is much similarity to the times of Jesus. Our world is indeed in a very dark place. Daily the news is disturbing and disheartening. Wars are rampaging in many places, thousands of innocent people are dying, millions are homeless, even more are living with hunger. That’s the world’s reality, but it isn’t just “over there.” It’s here in our own city and neighboring towns. Gun violence and unspeakable acts of hate are even at our own doorstep. Like many other faith communities, we are asking the Lord for hope, and the truth is, we are asking for Christ to be our light. “We pray, please Lord, send your Spirit to bring us peace,” when the core of that prayer is the hope that Christ will come again and change our world. We want to hear a loud voice of the second coming of Christ saying, “I am the light of the world. And I am here now!”

At the same time, the scriptures are clear that it is not only Christ who is the light of the world. Do you recall the message Jesus gave that is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Here are the familiar words.

*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before all that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*

What did Jesus mean? If he claimed to be the Light, how can that be our job? That's exactly what he meant. You and I are also supposed to be a light in a time of darkness. Our faith in Christ and our commitment to discipleship requires that our lives reflect Christ to the world.

That part of the concept of Light is challenging at its best. We don't often think about how our lives might be a light to someone else, but Jesus understood that and was clear in his message. In the book of Acts, Paul puts it this way:

*“For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”*

It seems clear that you and I as believers have a responsibility to be the light for non-believers, and not just them, but to those who either have never found Christ as savior and also those who are Christian but have moved away from his light. Often, we forget that our role as a disciple of Jesus is not only to straighten up our own lives but also to do the work of God Our Heavenly Parent here on earth. Perhaps we forgot that we are not only His children, but we are also his employees. We are directed to be the light in the world. Trust me, that's a tough job. But I can testify that when your light shines on someone else and changes their life or has an impact on them, the result leaves you with such a sense of joy and accomplishment. For any Christian to hear the words, “You have made a difference in my life,” brings such a sense of heavenly thanks. You have been the light in someone's life.

There's another aspect in finding the meaning of the Biblical definition of the light. Let me use some practicality of life as an illustration. Sometimes when we turn the lights on in a room of our home, we are surprised at what we see. There are times when I turn the lights on and say to myself, “Oh, my, I need to dust” or “I'd better get out the vacuum cleaner.” Or we turn the light on in our work area and think, “What a

mess. I'd better clean this up." I won't go to any observations about my kitchen or pantry or fridge. It's best to leave that light off. But the message is clear. Light can show the bad sides of our lives.

As trivial as those illustrations are, they serve as a wake-up call that there is a reason for our Lord to take on that role of Christ as the Light in our life. Jesus states it this way in John's Gospel:

*"Light has come into the world, but some loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done through God."*

The powerful message here is simple. When the light of Christ comes into our lives, all of our deeds, both good and bad, can be seen not just by God, but often by the entire world. That light will show us and others what we have done, some of which needs forgiveness.

Truthfully, some people don't want their deeds to be brought to light. They would prefer to live in the darkness of cover-up. It's when a person realizes that his life without Christ will always be missing two things: forgiveness and hope for eternal life. When I became a Christian as a teen-ager, it was not because I was afraid that I was bound for hell. It was because I wanted forgiveness and the hope of beginning a new life free of guilt and shame. With that new light in my own life, I made the commitment to the Lord that I would do as much as I could to be a light to my world. Christ had shown me by the sermons of a minister and the teachings of Sunday School that I needed a new light in my life, and I am thankful every day that I found that.

There is a strong message in the First Book of John that sums this up very clearly. Let me share that:

*“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us.”*

Now what does this all mean when we sing “Christ Be Our Light” and try to understand what that means for us as individuals and as a church. First, we must acknowledge that Christ is indeed the Light of the World and his coming again will bring light into our darkened world. Just as he did for the Israelites in the days of his coming to life as the Messiah, he will do that for our world, too. Second, we must realize that it is the light of Christ that turns on the lights in our lives and shows us those sins that keep us in the darkness. When we acknowledge our deeds in life and take accountability for each of those, then the light will blot out the darkness and we will walk in the light of Christ. Third, we need to be reminded that as believers you and I have been given a job to be the light to others in our world. Following Christ’s example, we practice the teachings of discipleship. Understand, that job is not always an easy one, but it is enormously rewarding when someone sees what we have done for God and thanks us for it.

I’m not sure I clarified for you exactly what it will mean for you each time you sing that chorus and the words “Shine in your church gathered today” but my hope is that you have been given something to think about as you remind yourself that Jesus indeed was and is the light of the world. Perhaps that might be included as part of your prayer life as well as a commitment on your part to be a better light in a dark world.

Let me share again some of the words to the hymn. They will sum up what I am trying to say today.

*Longing for light, we wait in darkness.*

*Longing for truth, we turn to you.*

*Make us your own, your holy people,*

*Light for the world to see.*

*Longing for peace, our world is troubled.*

*Longing for hope, many despair.*

*Your word alone has power to save us.*

*Make us your living voice.*

*Longing for food, many are hungry.*

*Longing for water, many still thirst.*

*Make us your bread, broken for others,*

*Shared until all are fed.*

With those words in our hearts, let us pray before we break the bread of communion together. Pray with me.