

Go Light Your World:
Embracing Christ—The Light of the World
John 8:12-20

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Do you remember the old story about an atheist walking through the woods admiring all the accidents of nature? As he absorbed the majestic trees, the powerful rivers, the beautiful animals, he suddenly heard a rustling in the bushes behind him. Turning to see what was the matter, the atheist found himself face-to-face with a seven-foot grizzly bear. The atheist did what any of us would do. He ran for dear life, but the bear was too fast and the atheist soon fell to the ground in exhaustion. Now eye-to-eye with the bear, the atheist cried out, "OH MY GOD." Immediately time stopped, the bear froze, the forest went silent, even the river stopped flowing. A bright light beamed from heaven and a voice cried out, "*You, who deny my existence, teach others that I don't exist, consider creation an accident - am I now to count you a believer?*" "Well," replied the atheist, "that would be a little hypocritical. Maybe you could just make the bear a Christian." "*Very well!*" replied the voice. The light went out, the river ran, the sounds of the forest resumed, the bear folded his paws, bowed his head and said, "Lord, for this food I am about to receive, I am truly thankful."

On the first night of the Tabernacle Festival at the Temple of Jerusalem, the blaze in the court was so bright that every courtyard in the city was illuminated. All night long the greatest, wisest, and holiest men of Israel danced before the Lord and sang praises to God. It was on that occasion that Jesus uttered the text I want us to turn to today. Jesus said, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*" (John 8:12). That's what I want to talk about today.

JESUS CHRIST, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. Jesus Christ is the word of God made flesh. John opens his gospel with these words, "*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.*" Verse 14 says, "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*"

One of the defining characteristics of Christianity is that we find the revelation of God primarily in a Person. Jews have the Torah (Law of Moses). Muslims have the Koran (revelation of Mohammed). Buddhists have the teachings of Buddha and Christians have Jesus Christ. He is the revelation of God's character and passion. He is God with us; He is the love of God made visible. In our very midst, He is the word of God, the revelation of God in a human form.

So the first question at the door of any Christian Church is, "What will you do with Jesus?" Dare you accept Him as Lord and Savior? Let me explain what that means.

Jesus Christ is the bridge to God made possible. One of the lingering images I have of Hurricane Katrina is not the awful pictures of human suffering, but an early photo of a freeway buckled into broken slabs of concrete, one with a car perched precariously on the brink, on what was once a main thoroughfare leading into New Orleans. I kept wondering, "Who was in that car? Did they get to safety? What happened to them in that moment of tragedy as they sat there on the brink of a broken road?" One reason rescue efforts were hindered is the fact that roads and bridges into the city were destroyed. The military had to restore the roads before the convoys could travel.

It all made me think of that Paul Simon song, Bridge Over Troubled Waters. Some of you who came of age in the 60's know it by heart. I like to paraphrase it this way:

When you are down and out
When you are on the street
When evenings fall so hard
Christ will comfort you.
He'll take your part, when darkness comes
And pain is all around
Like a bridge over troubled waters, Jesus lays himself down.
Like a bridge over troubled waters, Jesus lays himself down.

That's what salvation is all about. The broken bridge to the city of God is restored through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the image of God made visible. Did you read in the paper about the London Zoo's newest exhibit? It features Homo sapiens in their natural environment. Inside a sealed enclosure, eight human beings spend their time sunning on a rock ledge, playing board games, and waving to spectators. Polly Wills, the zoo spokesperson says, "The purpose of the exhibit is to down play the uniqueness of human beings as a species. The exhibit teaches people that humans are just another form of primate animals. We are not that special."

The Bible has a better idea. According to Genesis, human beings are created in the image of God. This Imago Deo, (God-likeness) exists in the heart of every person. Before there was original badness, there was original goodness. That spark of goodness which Quakers call the "inner light" lives in the heart of every person. It is the image of God in the heart of human beings.

Because the inner light gets hidden under the bowl of greed, guilt, grief, self-indulgence, self-righteousness, self-centeredness, Christ came to rekindle the flame. He came to light up your life. Could your life use some light today? In the midst of trying to live and make a living, raise a family, be responsible, could your life use some light today?

JESUS CHRIST IS OUR LIGHT OF LIFE. *"Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* Could your life use some enlightenment?

We can encounter His grace. Grace is the unearned, unmerited, unconditional love of God that makes it all right even when we've done it all wrong. All of us occasionally do right. A few predominantly do what is right, but none of us always does what is right. Because we are fallible human beings we need forgiveness. We need the strength to begin again. That's what grace does for us. That is what we are offered in Jesus Christ—the chance to start again.

Thomas Edison and his staff worked hundreds of hours manufacturing a single light bulb. When the invention was finished, Edison asked a young assistant to take it upstairs to the testing room. The young man was so excited he stumbled and fell, shattering the light bulb on the steps. That's when Edison assembled his staff and started working on another light bulb. When it was finished Edison called the same assistant to carry it upstairs to the testing room.

That's what Jesus Christ does for us; he gives us a second chance. In fact, He wants us to keep coming back until we get it right. No matter how many times we keep coming back, He gives us grace and that's what grace is all about. He is the light of life; He came to shine on you. No wonder we call grace amazing.

We can embody His values. Tiger Woods is a Nike man from head to toe. They pay him about one hundred million dollars to wear Nike footwear, Nike clothes, Nike gloves, Nike hats, and yes, he hits Nike balls.

Paul says to the Church at Colosse, "*Clothe yourselves in Christ. Put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. Forgive as the Lord forgives you. And above all, love one another.*"

My mother used to say:

Christ has no hands but our hands to do his work today,
He has no feet but our feet to lead men in His way,
We are the only Bible the careless world will read,
We are the sinner's gospel; we are the scoffer's creed.

Become the body of Christ! Live a life of clarified values. Be a Christ person.

We can embrace His light. I want to walk as a child of the Light. I want to follow Jesus. How about you? II Corinthians 4:6 says, "*The light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus.*" I know that's hard to understand. There are many things about the nature of Christ that my small mind cannot comprehend. Christians have done things in the name of Christ that surely make God shudder. We've used His name to support our ideas and our ideals that would be far away from the way of God. Like people of every century, people of the 21st century form opinions about Him. We know in part and understand in part. But when the light fully comes, we shall know even as we are fully known.

In the meantime, I want to walk as a child of the light. I want to follow Jesus. For you see, life is not about you; life is not about me. Life is about following

Jesus. So, I want to give as much of myself as I understand to as much of Christ as I can comprehend. That really is all He ever asks. Would you claim Him as Savior and Lord?

So, I end where I began. What will you do with Jesus? We can hesitate making up our minds, but we cannot hesitate making up our lives. For our lives get made up one way or another. You can choose not to choose, but life will choose for you. What will you do with Jesus who is called the Christ?

Amen.

