

Live in the light * John 7, 8

February 2, 2020 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

Have you ever gotten up in the middle of the night and bumped into something or stepped on something that you really didn't want to? Like, a Lego or something? It's so painful!

I don't know if this is TMI, but I remember waking up one night and heading for the bathroom and stepping right onto something that went 'squish.' I turned on the light and found that one of our cats ate her food a little too vigorously and (blecccch) and of course, in the darkness, I stepped right into it. It was pretty gross.

The darkness is like that, isn't it? It hides things that you probably want to avoid. It prevents you from seeing clearly and it's easy to get tripped up when you walk in the dark.

That's true generally, but it's also true spiritually. We can do things out in the light or we can hide them away in the darkness. We can see things in the light of God or we can dabble with sin in the shadows. And remember what we said was the quintessential problem back in John chapter 3? We tend to love darkness more than the light.

But God doesn't want to leave us there. God doesn't want us living in the darkness. And so He sent Jesus to be the light of the world. And here, this morning, we have 'the-light-of-the-world' calling us to ask ourselves – where are we living? In the darkness or in the light? Are we content to live in the shadows or do we live out in the open, in the blazing sunlight of God?

Turn with me to John chapter 7, starting at verse 40 and I'll show you why I say that. John chapter 7, verse 40.

Now as you can probably see, that puts us right in the middle of the action. In chapter 7, Jesus and His disciples go up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles and that sets off a public debate about who exactly He is. By verses 40-41, they're asking who is this Jesus? Is He the prophet? Is He the Christ? Is He sent by God or just some charlatan?

40 On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet."

41 Others said, "He is the Christ." Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee?" (Joh 7:40-41 NIV).

Certainly, that's the view of the Pharisees – by verse 47, they're outright condemning Jesus – but look at who steps up to defend Him. Did you notice that in verse 50? It's Nicodemus. Apparently, since John 3, he has trusted Jesus and been born again, and now he's gone back into the world to stand up for Jesus. That's pretty great. But the question remains – who is Jesus?

Well, to get the answer, we have to jump ahead to John chapter 8, verse 12. And we have to talk about the Feast of Tabernacles. Cause that's why all these people were gathered in Jerusalem in the first place. They were there for the feast of Tabernacles. So what's the feast of tabernacles?

The Feast of Tabernacles was a yearly celebration - a harvest time celebration - that was meant to remind people of how God had cared for their ancestors in the desert years and how God had provided for them in the past year. It's a bit like our Thanksgiving, except that instead of thinking back to the

pilgrims and the Mayflower, the people thought back to their ancestors in the desert. And instead of making pumpkin pies and handprint turkeys, they made booths – shelters to live in, just as their ancestors had when they wandered through the desert.

And given that this was a celebration of God's providence through the desert, eventually other symbols of God's providence seeped in. Remember the time God gave them water from the rock? Well, the Feast of Booths had a water ceremony to celebrate that event. And the pillar of fire that led them through the desert? Well, there was a special light ceremony meant to celebrate that. And here's how it went -

They would gather out in the Women's court of the Temple, and light these four giant fires in golden bowls that shed light over all of Jerusalem. You get a sense of how big they were when you realize that they used worn out pants and belts from the priests as the wicks for these things. So they had these giant fires and the Levites stood on the steps with musical instruments and sang songs and praises; guys would dance around with lit torches in the hands, singing praise to God. All of this comes from Jewish writings that conclude – if you've never seen this celebration, then you've never seen rejoicing in your life!ⁱ

It's at this very moment with fires blazing in the background, lighting up the night sky that Jesus stands up and says 'I am the light of the world.'

That's chapter 8 verse 12 - 12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (Joh 8:12 NIV).

Jesus knows how to make a point, doesn't He? "You know how God lit your ancestor's way through the desert? You know how this fire lights up the dark corners of Jerusalem? That's me and anyone who follows me will never walk in darkness again.

Now clearly, when Jesus says 'I am the light of the world,' He's drawing on the memory of the pillar of fire that led Israel through the desert. "Your ancestor followed the fire through the desert and it lit their way; same with me – anyone who follows Me will never walk in darkness." He's also drawing on the imagery of the glory of God that filled the temple when Solomon dedicated it. It was so radiant that the priests couldn't even go in. That's all tucked into the statement 'I am the light of the world,' but light is also a very common metaphor in a lot of cultures.

So let's think about this – what do you think of when you think of darkness? (danger, the unknown, sin, 'moral badness.' One of the commentaries I read this week pointed out that "In Greek thought, darkness was often associated with ignorance and death, ~~while light symbolized life and happiness~~" (Mounce, EBC, 8:12).

All of that is wrapped up in the idea of darkness; what about 'light'? What does light represent as a metaphor? (safety, security, moral goodness, righteousness). And that commentary concluded: In Greek thought, ~~darkness was often associated with ignorance and death, while~~ light symbolized life and happiness.

So when Jesus says 'I am the light of the world,' He's taking all of that, wrapping it up with all the biblical allusions and saying – 'I'm that.' I'm the guiding light; I'm the glorious light; I'm the light in the darkness.

I'm the light that gives life. And if you follow Me, you will never walk in darkness, but you will thrive in the light.

Following Jesus means living in the light.

That I think is the main idea and main goal of this passage – to motivate us to follow Jesus and in following Jesus - live in the light.

Without God, we tend to love the darkness. We do things we know are wrong but they're done in the dark so hopefully nobody will know.

But when we decide to follow Jesus, He comes in and flips on the light and says – look! See these things for what they truly are!

We've gone a few times to laser tag and in the darkness it looks pretty cool – there's glow in the dark paint everywhere and it's exciting and appealing – and yet I've often wondered – what does this place look like in the light? I'll bet there's scuffs and scratches all over the place. I'll bet there's cobwebs on the ceiling and dust in the corner.

Sin is like that too – in the darkness, it looks pretty exciting, but in the light, you see it for what it truly is – degrading and really very helpful.

When we follow Jesus, He gives us a brand new start, reorients our hearts from darkness to light and leads us in paths of life-giving light. He leads us out of the darkness and into the light. He leads us out of the darkness and into the light so we will live our lives there – in the light!

Gary Burge boils it right down for us -

“If Jesus is the light, walking ‘in the light’ is a good description of discipleship” (256).

Following Jesus means living in the light.

So let me ask you – are you following Jesus? Have you trusted Him and been made new and set your life to following Him? If you haven't then invite Him in – let Him shine life-giving light into your life and He will light your path before. If you have, then let's ask the next question – are you living in the light?

Jesus says – if you follow Me, you will never walk in darkness again. Following Jesus means living in the light – but let's acknowledge – even for believers, it's easy to slip back into the shadows, isn't it? To say ‘oh, well, this won't hurt anybody.’ Or ‘it doesn't really matter how I treat this cashier or waitress.’ Or ‘it's ok for me to be jealous of someone for something they have.’

The light of the world – Jesus whom we follow – steps in and flips on the light and says ‘No. That's sin. That's darkness. And it's below you as a child of light. Why are you fumbling in darkness when you can thrive in the light?’

If that's you this morning, I want to encourage you to invite Jesus to shine a light over your life – every corner and nook and cranny – see things for what they truly are – and commit anew to living in the light. Bring your life out into the open and follow Jesus in life-giving light.

Following Jesus means living in the light.

Now that's the point of the 'I am' statement, but you may be wondering why we jumped over the story of the woman caught in adultery. I've just told you that chapter 7 they're asking 'who is Jesus, who is Jesus' and then chapter 8, verse 12 Jesus answers – 'I am the light of the world' – Why doesn't 8 verse just appear at the end of chapter 7?

Well, to be honest, it probably originally did.

If you look in your Bible, you'll probably see a note at the end of chapter 7 that says '7:53 to 8:11 are not in the earliest manuscripts' which means it's possible that John didn't write the adulterous woman story when he first wrote the Gospel. When John wrote the Gospel, it probably went like Diana read it for us – right from 7:52 into 8:12 – which is why I've handled it this way this morning.

It's not there in the very earliest manuscripts but it IS there in very early on – the Western church Fathers knew it well – in fact Augustine and Jerome both comment on it in the 300's and Augustine actually speculates that someone might have taken it out for fear that it would promote sexual promiscuity given Jesus' action towards the woman. ⁱⁱ In God's sovereignty it has become a part of our Bible and I actually think it's here to illustrate our point. I think it's actually here to illustrate the idea that following Jesus means living in the light.

You probably know this story so I won't take long on it. Jesus is in the courtyard of women and the Pharisees haul up this naked woman and say 'Look, we caught her in the act of adultery and the Law says to stone her; what do you say 'oh wise teacher'?

They're clearly setting a trap for Jesus – either He affirms the Law and condemns her or denies it and gives them ammunition against Him. This is clearly a trap. If they really cared about justice, then the man should have been there too – but he's got off scot-free and here they haul this poor girl in front of the crowd alone as bait in a trap to trip Jesus up.

Well, Jesus bent down to write on the ground with His finger. I've heard lots of suggestions what He was writing. There are a couple Scripture passages that I think are possible; others say He was just doing it to take people's eyes off the women; Stan Fowler – my old theology prof – used to say that he thought Jesus was writing the names of the women that the Pharisees themselves were sleeping with. Hard to say.

But whatever He writes, He gets up and He says – "ok, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7 NIV).

Now listen, this doesn't mean that you have to be sinless to call a sin a sin – that's not what Jesus is saying at all. Yes, this woman has sinned. She's been living in darkness. She has committed sin and it was wrong.

But Jesus holds up a mirror to the Pharisees and says 'hold on guys – you're just as much in the dark as she is. You're willing to murder her just to trap me? That's dark. And I think that He is inviting them to consider their own morality and come out of the darkness and into the light. But they're not willing to admit their sin to Jesus and so they slink back to the shadows, leaving Jesus alone with the woman.

He finishes writing on the ground and then says to the woman -

And then He gets up again and says to the woman - 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (Joh 8:10-11 NIV).

He is inviting her to come out of the darkness, to follow Him into the light. Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn the world – remember John 3:17 - 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him?

Jesus is offering her a brand new life – leaving her life of sin, leaving the darkness, and following Him so that she will never walk in darkness again. He's not discounting the seriousness of her sin; but because He will die on the Cross for her sin and my sin and your sin, He can be merciful to her and offer her life. He's tough on sin but gracious to sinners. And so He offers her life and says 'why fumble in darkness when you can thrive in the light?' Following Jesus means living in the light.

So that's Jesus 'I am the light of the world' statement – let's just take a minute as we wrap up here to apply to ourselves. Jesus says "I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in darkness but have the light of life." Following Jesus means living in the light. Why is it important that we live in the light?

Well, besides the salvation part, think about it – here in John, Jesus says "I am the light of the world." But over in Matthew, what does Jesus say? "YOU are the light of the world." We are the light of the world. You don't put a bowl over it; it set it up on a stand and let it shine!

We follow the light and live in the light to be light to the world!

Jesus draws us out of darkness and into the light so that we will carry that light into the darkest corners of the world!

And by dark corners, I'm not talking about the hidden corners of Africa; I'm talking about being light in a culture where people say one thing and do the other; where they take credit for other people's work; where they refuse to pay people fairly for their work; where they think that putting people down is a good way to get ahead. Canada is a great place to live; Brantford is a great place to live, but there is darkness in our midst. There's darkness in all of us. But Jesus frees us from that to go out and carry His light into the world. To be a beacon of goodness and safety and value to people who desperately need it. We follow the light to be light to the world.

I want to encourage you this week to think about how you can be light to the world.

I mean, maybe it starts with this – when you encounter people – are they getting darkness from you? Or light? Maybe ask a friend or a spouse? When you talk to people – are you communicating sunshine or rain? I know that here we are all sunshine but I have no idea what you're like at home 😊 I'm certainly optimistic but I want to encourage you – be light to the world. Make following Jesus the central priority of your life so that you will overflow with light and shine hope and joy into the world

around you. Pay someone a compliment. Be a listening ear. Be a force of light that pushes back the darkness.

Why fumble in darkness when you can live in the light? Following Jesus means living in the light.

BENEDICTION

14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

15 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.

16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

(Mat 5:14-16 NIV).

ⁱ Mishnah Sukkah 5:1-4

The flute was for five or six days. This refers to the flute at the Bet Hashoevah [the place of the water-drawing] which does not override Shabbat or the festival day. They said: he who has not seen the Simchat Bet Hashoevah has never seen rejoicing in his life.

At the conclusion of the first festival day of Sukkot they descended to the Women's Court (Ezrat Nashim) and they would make there a great enactment. And golden candlesticks were there, and four golden bowls on the top of each of them and four ladders to each, and four youths drawn from the young priests, and in their hands there were jars of oil containing one hundred and twenty logs which they poured into the bowls.

From the worn-out pants and belts of the priests they made wicks and with them they kindled the lamps. And there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that was not illuminated by the light of the Bet Hashoevah.

Men of piety and good deeds used to dance before them with lighted torches in their hands, and they would sing songs and praises. And Levites with innumerable harps, lyres, cymbals and trumpets and other musical instruments stood upon the fifteen steps leading down from the Court of the Israelites to the Court of the Women, corresponding to the fifteen songs of ascents in the Psalms, and it was on these [steps] that the Levites stood with their musical instruments and sang their songs.

ⁱⁱ Some men of slight faith, or, rather, some hostile to true faith, fearing, as I believe, that liberty to sin with impunity is granted their wives, remove from their scriptural texts the account of our Lord's pardon of the adulteress, as though he who said, "From now on, sin no more," granted permission to sin, or as though the woman should not have been cured by the divine physician by the remission of that sin in order not to offend others who are equally unclean. St. Augustine of Hippo. *On Adulterous Marriages* 2.7.6.