

I Am the Light of the World

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[0 : 00] I've got a bit of a confession. I have a thing about lights. Christmas, I'll tell you, I'm in my element. If it stands still long enough, I'll cover it with sparkling lights. Mandy despairs.

And when Christmas lights have to be packed away, I have to be content with garden lighting. I love garden lighting. Or a quick trip to John Lewis. Wow, do I love the lighting department of John Lewis? All that creative and innovation around lights. Just sit there bathed and it's wonderful. I like John's gospel because, like me, he's got a little bit of a thing about lights at Christmas. Right at the beginning of the gospel, we get this message that's always read at Christmas. The word became flesh. In the beginning was the word. And in verse 5, we get this, the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

Have you ever been in a room where it had no windows and it was totally, totally dark? So dark, you could almost feel the darkness. Darkness and fear so often, sadly, go together.

It's not just the fear. It's that feeling, I guess, of being lost, out of control, not able to see your way out. Darkness can affect that in so many ways in our situations in life.

Darkness confuses. Darkness distorts. Darkness is often dangerous. No wonder John in his gospel makes much of the image of darkness to communicate spiritual truth. But in the midst of that darkness is the light. The light of the world, Jesus. The light shines in the dark and the light has never extinguished it. What encouraging words. The very people who are about to question Jesus in our reading this morning are at the heart of the temple. And they are the very ones who will be looking to extinguish that light. Certainly they were looking to extinguish the light on Good Friday.

[2 : 19] No, no, no, no. That wasn't going to work. Here in our reading this morning, Jesus makes a big claim. He's not boasting. When Jesus spoke again to the people in the heart of the temple, he said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. It's important to look at that reading because in the middle is whoever follows me. You know, the idea of following Jesus, of following the light, is always revealed in the New Testament as radical. This idea of following Jesus. The disciples left everything to follow him. You and I may have experienced that ourselves, what it has cost to follow Jesus. And here in this text, we discover the idea that the one who follows Jesus will never walk in darkness. That is so comforting. We aren't meant to be in the dark. We are made for the light.

As I had already prophesied back in the Old Testament, the people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned.

As Jesus' disciples, we don't want to walk in the darkness. We don't have to. So why is it that so many people stumble in life?

Why is it that so many Christians get tempted away? Jesus had already revealed that some would walk and love the darkness.

When we read John 3.16, which is a verse that most people can recite to probably know, we forget what follows. And it says, This then is the judgment. The light has come into the world, and people love darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil.

[4 : 17] It's true. That everyone who practices wicked things hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. Very true.

But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God. But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light.

There's something that is so beautiful about being in the light. We have to face it. Some people will purposely and stubbornly and decidedly reject the light.

And you and I may despair as we see them repeatedly again and again fall into dark ways. Lies, deceit, deception. Maybe you're alongside somebody at the moment, and you're struggling with

seeing them repetitively make the same mistakes over and over again.

I recall many, many years back at a Christian event. There was a men's summoner. And a guy who was leading said to the gathered group of men, Where are you as disciples today?

[5 : 27] Are you in the dark or are you in the light? And he invited men who sensed maybe there was darkness in their life or something they wanted to, to come forward for prayer.

That was brilliant. A lot of guys went forward. Then, my goodness, he went one step further. And he said, There are some men here who are carrying two mobile phones.

One of those phones is for your wife and family. The other phone is for your mistress. And I would invite you to step out of that darkness into the light.

Bring that other mobile phone out here and leave it at the front as you're prayed for. Wow. My goodness. There was this sort of gasp in the room.

By the end of that meeting, there were five mobile phones that were left at the front to be destroyed. You see, the darkness can't stand the light.

[6 : 32] The light will always shine. I love that song that we sing. It's my lighthouse, my lighthouse, shining in the darkness, I will follow you.

It's a great song. I really miss that singing it, singing that at church and singing that at school. It talks of Jesus being a lighthouse of a light that warns us away from the rocks of life, the darkness of the hidden rocks that will wreck not just our boat, but it will wreck our life and our relationship.

Here is the good news. In the midst of the temple, Jesus declares, I am the light of the world. See, this this morning is a call to follow.

It's about radical discipleship, but it's also a promise because he is the light of the world. We don't walk in darkness when we're close to the light.

You know, I'm encouraged by the amazing things I'm seeing during this pandemic of Christians that are walking so close to the light and doing amazing things in the community.

[7 : 46] The light is shining. We are called to be light carriers into the dark places of this world where there is hopelessness and there is despair.

In Revelation 21, it says the city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it for the glory of God gives it light and the lamb is its lamp.

What a wonderful picture of Christ carrying light through us into the community. Today, allow Jesus to draw close.

Allow him to shine that light even stronger in your life, to feel that warmth and presence that the light and power of the Holy Spirit can bring as we walk closely to him, totally alongside him day by day.

But you may say, I don't have much to offer. What can I offer? How can I bring that? How can I partner with him in this light? I'll end with a story that I heard recently on a podcast.

[8 : 56] The great pianist, Jan Paderewski, was playing a six-month sellout concert in New York. There was a lady, she took her nine-year-old son, she dressed them all up in a tuxedo, it was a posh day, and they got seats in the front row, booked presumably well in advance.

They arrived and she sat down, he's quite fidgety, she gets distracted and a moment later she is suddenly aware to her horror that her nine-year-old son is on the stage, seated at what was this, I guess, glorious and priceless Steinway.

People started shouting at him for him to get off and the boy started playing with two fingers, chopsticks. Paderewski, hearing the melee, appeared on stage and ushered the security people that were ready to grab the boy and remove him from the stage.

And as the boy continued playing, Paderewski knelt behind the boy. He wrapped his arms around him and played this amazing concerto that blended with what the boy was playing.

The lights dimmed and a single spotlight, a light, shone on the two of them, making beautiful music together. The crowd stood.

[10 : 30] The crowd roared with applause and Paderewski was heard to whisper to the boy. Don't stop. Keep going.

You're doing great. Don't stop. Keep going. You're doing great. I sense that while I was preparing this, there are those who feel that they don't have much to offer.

Maybe the light of Christ isn't shining as brightly in them as they think it should. Be encouraged today. Allow Jesus to come and shine that light fully into your life.

draw close to him, allow him to wrap his arms around you. Feel the warmth of his presence and his light. Feel the experience of that light shining brightly.

And I pray today that you would hear those words from Jesus. Don't stop. Keep going. You're doing great.