

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Light of the World

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Scripture: John 8:12 & Matthew 5:14-16

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."

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A town built 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 others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Transcript:

Well, good morning, BelPres. It is so great to be with you. My name is Annie Duncan. I'm the executive pastor here. And this morning, the scripture comes from the book of John chapter 8, verse 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." So God, we thank you for today, we ask that you open our ears, open our hearts, open our eyes, to see your truth this morning, Jesus, you are the light of the world. So help us to understand what that means this morning together. It's in your name that we pray. Amen. Well, we are in a sermon series, looking at all the different names of God and names matter and the names of God matter. And in today's passage of scripture, Jesus, the son of God gives himself a name. He says, "I am the light of the world."

And just a quick sidebar. I love the Book of John. Often when people come to me and say, Pastor Annie, I don't know where to start. I'm just trying to read my Bible. I often point them to the Book of John. So read it from chapter 1 to 21. It is such an incredible gospel. And it's often called the gospel of light because there's so many references to light and dark throughout it. John actually opens his gospel by saying the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. "The true light that gives light to

everyone was coming into the world." So this is how John starts off his gospel. And in John's light here is Jesus. Jesus is the light that John is talking about. And so if you read the entire Book of John, by the time you get to chapter eight, where Jesus says, "I am the light of the world," you're kind of like, oh yeah, I saw that coming. I totally saw that coming.

But this proclamation by Jesus, it's sandwiched by all of these other things. There's so much going on. There's so many questions and arguments and disputes that are happening. I mean, just listen to this list. There's division over who Jesus is, there's unbelief of the Jewish leaders, there's dispute over Jesus' testimony and there's dispute over who Jesus is. And it's in the midst of that, that Jesus says "I am the light of the world." It's in response to that, that Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." And Jesus says that to a group of people that have kind of gathered around him. And just like when I read through the book of John and I'm familiar with this theme of light, those that were surrounding Jesus, they would have been familiar with it too but in a different way. And hearing Jesus say, "I am the light of the world," they would have recalled prophecies from Isaiah that are talking about the coming Messiah.

In Isaiah 9:2, it says, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." So when Jesus says, "I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." He's doing a couple of things here. He's fulfilling the Isaiah prophecy, he's naming himself as the great light, the light of the world, and he's inviting those to follow him, to walk out of the dark and to have the light of life. You can't underestimate like this moment, it would have been like a mic drop moment. And those gathered there would have seen, oh my gosh, this is a big deal because Jesus naming himself as the light of the world. It was as if he was saying to all of those gathered, like the thing you're searching for it's me. I'm it. I'm the light.

Well, Jesus has a lot more to say, but he has another critical thing to say about the light of the world. But before we get to that critical thing, first check this out. So we are in week 11, looking at all the names of God and in the first 10 weeks, here's all that we've looked at. God most high, God who sees me, Lord God almighty, refiner's fire, the Lord is my banner, Jehovah, [foreign language 00:04:16], consuming fire, the good shepherd, wisdom of God and lion and the lamb. And I know many of you like my all in group, high [inaudible 00:04:26] all in group. I know many of you have been praying these names daily and how powerful of an experience that's been for you in praying these names and just seeing how deep and wide and vast God's power and love for us all.

So here we are in week 11, looking at the name, light of the world. And here's the critical thing that we need to understand about this name. Jesus names himself as the light of the world. But he also gives this name to us. "You are the light of the world. A

town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stands and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven." So did you catch that? Jesus names himself as the light of the world, and he named us as the light of the world. It's huge. So how can he be the light of the world and also say that we are the light of the world?

Well throughout all of the gospels, Jesus reiterates over and over how he comes from the Father, he speaks for the Father, he's going back to the Father and he and the Father are one. Jesus' light comes from being in relationship with the Father and Jesus models for this and invites us to do that too. He says, "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven." So just as Jesus' light points to his relationship with God, the father, our light should highlight not us, but Jesus, the source of all light. So how do we shine Jesus' light? First we turn our light on. The only reason you need access to light is because something is dark. In our bedroom at home, we have walk in closet and because my husband loves me, it is my walk in closet. And so every morning I go into the closet, I flip on the light and I pick out what shoes I'm going to wear.

But here's the thing about this closet, is the door to the closet doesn't shut because I've got a pull up bar installed in the doorframe. And so when my husband is sleeping and I go into that closet and flip on the light, guess what happens? It wakes him up. But I didn't know this. And I've been doing this for a very long time. But just last week he mentioned something like, man, I wish the door to that closet shut. Because every time you turn on the light, it wakes me up. And I was like, what? It does? And he said, "Well, yeah, because it's dark. And when you turn on the light, it's not dark anymore." And I was like, "Oh, you have a point there." When you turn on a light in the dark, it disrupts the dark. And it's hard to notice. So in light of what Jesus, see what I did there.

So in light of what Jesus says about being the light of the world, what needs light? The darkness. And what is Jesus saying that he's lighting up? The world. And what does he invite us to light up? The world. The reason you need light is because something is dark and the world can be a dark place. The word for world in Greek is cosmos. So don't think world as in planet. But think world is in its people, its structure, its systems. How do we shine Jesus' light in our cosmos? How do we shine Jesus' light in our world? Well we turn on our light and our light is Jesus' light and it points to Jesus. And don't confuse light with simply being nice, it's not about being nice. It's more than that. It's how we live differently because we have access to Jesus' light inside of us and it disrupts the darkness around us. And it's hard not to notice.

And I don't think that any of us can argue that there is some darkness in our world right now. All you have to do is look around. In this past week with the shootings in Atlanta and the eight lives lost and the increased hate crimes against our Asian-American

brothers and sisters. Not just in Atlanta, but in Seattle, in our country right now. That is absolute darkness. Hate, abuse, addiction, gossip, lies, bullying, cheating, all darkness. Systems and policies and procedures that make it seem impossible to see any kind of change, darkness. Wherever we see darkness, there's no room for it as bearers of Jesus' light. And we must do everything in our power to be Jesus' light in the darkness. So turn your light on. I'm not talking the light on your lamp or the light in your walk in closet, but turn your light on in your cosmos, in your school, in your workplace, in your family.

Because Jesus wants us to be his light for all of our systems. The education industry, the entertainment industry, in our government, in our political and medical, all of our cosmos, all of our worlds. And in so much of our world, there is no light on, so we need to turn it on. In Genesis, it says that, "We are made in God's image." And Jesus is God's son. So we walk in Jesus' image, the OG, the light of the world. And we get to be that light of the world to a world that desperately needs it. So how would you answer this question? Where in your world needs the light of Jesus? What's the first thing that comes to your mind? Maybe it's a system, maybe it's a situation or a neighbor or a community. However, you answer that question, take that as a nudge from Jesus to shine Jesus' light there. So how do we shine Jesus' light?

First we turn our light on. Second, we turn other things off. We cannot shine Jesus' light unless we've experienced the life giving light of Jesus. And when we experience Jesus, we grow deeper in relationship with him and we're never the same because of it. Jesus loves you. Pastor Scott says often that, "Jesus loves us just the way we are, but too much to let us stay the way we are." So the more of Jesus' love and light that gets inside of us, the more that other things in our life we're going to turn away from, or we're going to turn off because we're becoming more like Jesus. And here's an important distinction. We don't turn away from things so that we can experience Jesus' love and light, but we turn away from those things because we've experienced Jesus' light. It's in response to being in relationship with Jesus that we are transformed.

So Bell Press, I know exactly what it's like to live for myself. I do it often. I choose things that satisfy me, I'm selfish, I think of myself first. I know exactly what that's like, but it's Jesus' love and light that nudges me to live differently. In John five, Jesus says, "Very truly, I tell you, the son can do nothing by himself. He can only do what he sees the father doing because whatever the father does, the son also does." I think about that verse a lot, because as much as I know what it means to live for myself, I want to live for Jesus. I want to live that verse. Like Jesus, I also want to be able to say, Annie can do nothing apart from herself, but she can only do what she sees Jesus doing. That's what I want to do. I want to turn other things off so that it can only live for Jesus. So when I keep that in mind, it transforms me. So what do you need to turn away from? What are the things in your life that you need to turn off?

Whether it's bad habits or an unhealthy lifestyle or an addiction, a great prayer to pray is Jesus, what do I need to turn off so that I can shine your light? And Bell Press, I believe that whenever we pray that prayer, the Holy Spirit is always going to highlight or nudge us in a particular way because Jesus wants to set us free. Jesus wants to transform us. It's out of his great love for us. So how do we shine Jesus' light? We turn our light on that points to Jesus. We turn other things off. And third, we leave our light on. It's not just a Sunday kind of light. Jesus didn't say you are the light of the church. He said, "You are the light of the world."

Now, maybe you're listening and thinking, oh Pastor Annie, I'm so tired. I don't know if I have a great bright light to shine. I maybe just have a little flicker of a flame. And that is okay because on our own, our light will go out. But our light is tied to the great source of all light. Our light is tied to Jesus, the light of the world. And Jesus says, he calls us to live a life that we cannot live apart from him. And he calls us to live a life we cannot live apart from each other. So if you're sitting there thinking my light is flickering, or my light has gone out, that is okay because you have brothers and sisters in Christ that can be the light for you.

So remember my closet story? Well, here's an update. During the past week, I have started to use my flashlight on my phone when I'm going into my closet, instead of just flipping on the very bright light in there. And you know what? That tiny little light on my phone. That's really all that I need to get done in the morning and it doesn't wake up my husband. Sometimes even the smallest of lights can make a difference. When I picture Jesus saying, I am the light of the world, I picture a huge lighthouse, bearing light, blazing light all over the planet. Just great, great light. And when I read that, Jesus calls me the light of the world, I think of a little light, this little light of mine. And that's okay. Bell Press, leave your light on because whether it's a blazing lighthouse, a blaze of light for the world to see, or whether it's a small little flickering flame, our light is connected to Jesus' light and collectively it is a blaze of fire all around the world.

My friend, Dana is a member of a Facebook group that is helping people find COVID vaccinations that are unable to, and she with others in the group use their mad like internet and technological skills, and they help connect people. Whether it's sending them a website link where they can make an appointment or whether it's getting on the phone and actually making the appointment for people. And I talked to her the other day about this, and she said, "The reason I enjoy doing this besides all the COVIDness is because this group is focused on racial justice and tries to reach out to communities and populations most adversely affected by COVID. Black, indigenous, persons of color, the elderly, disabled, et cetera. It's that part of their mission that makes it feel like a call to me, even though it's not a church thing," she says.

And I love this story so much because it's so real. And it's authentic to who Dana is. And it's one of the ways that she is shining Jesus' light to her community for such a time

as this. And now I can't do what Dana is doing. Like I'm not as great on the internet as she is. And she would say, Annie, I can't do what you're doing. She's like, I would never preach on a Sunday. We are all going to shine our light, Jesus' light in different ways. And that's great. We'll never know the impact that we have of our light because it's not our light. It's Jesus' light that's inside of us. And it's not in the moments where it's convenient that we've got to shine. It's in every single moment. It's in our day to day, it's in the mundane. So leave your light on, leave your light that's connected to Jesus light on because it matters.

My dad, he loves cycling and because of his love for cycling, he goes to his local bike shop often. And my mom would say, he goes there too often. But because he visits this bike shop often, he's gotten to know some of the employees that work there. And over the past many years, he struck up a friendship with one of the employees there named Ty. And they mostly talk about bikes, but over the past many years, they've gotten to know each other and things have gotten a little bit deeper. Ty finds out that my dad is a Christian and some years pass. Ty's mom passes away and Ty seeks counsel from my dad. And some more years pass. And Ty goes through some really hard stuff in his family and seeks counsel again from my dad. And more time passes. Ty gets curious and starts reading the Bible, and Ty meets with my dad's pastor. Then Ty got baptized. My dad got to be there and now Ty is on fire for Jesus.

My dad would not call himself an evangelist. He is a CPA that loves cycling but he's got some light. He's got some light inside of him. He didn't go to that bike shop targeting the bike shop and thinking I'm going to go there and evangelize the store employees. No, he lived his life and he was faithful to who God put in his path. And over time, and in this case, a handful of many, many years, that light made a difference. And the story doesn't end there because now Ty has got some light. Ty is on fire and the few of the store employees that he worked with, they start to notice and now they start reading the Bible and they got baptized and they've got some light too. And now in a bike shop in Redmond on Saturday mornings, they get there really early, there's three employees that get there early and my dad joins them for a Bible study before the store opens.

What started as one light is now four lights. And again, that story isn't over because those lights are just going to continue to grow. When we shine, Jesus' light, it impacts those around us and it also impacts us because my dad would say that Ty is now discipling him. Jesus says, "I'm the light of the world." And he also says, "In this world, you will have trouble." He could also say darkness. "In this world, you will have darkness, but take heart. I have overcome the world." Jesus is the light of the world. There is trouble and darkness in the world. He has overcome the world and he invites us to be the light of the world.

So BelPres this week, pray. Pray to the light of the world, pray and accept Jesus' invitation to share in that name and to be the light of the world to those around you. And as you pray to the light of the world, be confident in this. That though the world is dark, Jesus' light can never be put out. He is the light of the world and Jesus was never intimidated by the dark, but he walked towards the dark. And so we walk hand in hand together knowing that there is no power of hell nor scheme of mankind that can ever extinguish the light of Jesus. So shine on Bell Press. God, we thank you for this truth, we thank you that you are the source of all light and Jesus, we thank you that you invite us to shine your light. So help us to be bold, help us to shine your light to the world that needs it so desperately. Amen.

Discussion Questions: Read John 8:12 & Matthew 5:14-16

Opening Questions:

- Icebreaker: What is something you are curious about and want to learn more about?
- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions -- Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions – Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Jesus gives himself the name Light of the World and also names us as the Light of the World – discuss the significance of how we share in this name with Jesus.
- What does it mean to you that Jesus' light is inside of you? How do you shine Jesus' light? Explain.

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week?
- Who might you share this with?