

August 16, 2015



## **“The God We Can Know: I Am the Light of the World”**

Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris

*John 8: 12-15*

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’ Then the Pharisees said to him, ‘You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.’ Jesus answered, ‘Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I judge no one.’

Jesus said: I am the light of the world.

This is the fourth and last sermon in this Summer Sermon Series on “The God We Can Know” through the teachings and sayings of Jesus. We’ve been looking at his “I Am” sayings in the Gospel of John—I Am the Door, I Am the Bread of Life, I Am the Vine, I am the Light of the World.

For each of these, we are seeing how Jesus built upon the name of God who said I Am Who I Am. John is teaching how God and Christ are one. Jesus is also using these sayings, as we have seen, to link himself to the religious roots of the people, and we will see that again today. And we have marveled at how his teaching method of using familiar objects and images as metaphors for the presence and impact of God in our lives. His I Am statements work on many levels from the quite literal to the deeply spiritual. In a few words, he transmits the wisdom of the ages and addresses the immediate spiritual needs of his followers.

Jesus said: I am the light of the world.

This time, he takes us all the way back to the beginning, you may realize. The very first words of the Book of Genesis: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.”

In John’s Gospel, there is no gap between those words at the very beginning of the Book of Genesis and the opening words of his story of the Good News of God in Christ Jesus: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”

Jesus summarizes all of this when he says: “I am the light of world.” I was with God in the beginning, he’s telling us. I am the light that brings life to world and to all people. And this light, this light, the darkness can never overcome.

Of course, the Hebrew people shared an understanding of the life-giving power of light with cultures and peoples in many lands and from many eras. Over the course of human history, humans have associated light, often symbolized as the Sun, with the greatest truths of their gods and goddesses--in the Chinese symbolism of the yin and the yang, in Zoroastrianism, the religion of the three Magi, in Buddhism which associates the Buddha with light, in the Shinto religion of Japan, in ancient Egypt where the Pharaoh Tutankhamen was represented by the sun...On our own continent, the Mayans, the Aztecs, the Pueblos and the Navajos all recognized the sun as the most powerful force in the universe, the primal source of creative life.

In claiming the name, Light of the World, Jesus takes on one of the oldest and most familiar names for the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. And as the earliest hymns and rituals of the church were created, they drew on ancient ways of honoring the Sun God. Key holidays in the Christian year were calendared in relation to the solstice. Through our special and unique belief in Christ as the light of the world, we Christians are bound together spiritually with peoples and cultures in every age, on every continent—not superior to, but intimately bound together with all the peoples of God’s great creation.

Jesus said: I am the light of the world. To be sure, that light is as wide as the whole of creation—and it is also as intimate and personal as the innermost recesses of our hearts. Remember the beautiful prayer of Zechariah from Luke’s gospel: “Through the love in the heart of our God, the Rising Sun will come to us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and guiding our steps into peace.”

We all come to this time of worship this morning with some shadow or darkness in our heart—some sorrow, some worry, some difficult decision, some breach with a family member, some heartache, some illness, some shadow that clouds our days and haunts our nights. The light of Christ awaits us here, bringing healing and redemptive love. It shines through the stained glass windows. It glows in the candles our acolytes light for us as worship begins. And that light is available to us at all times, through prayer, through study of God's Word, through simply turning off our devices and sitting long enough in silence to hear the voice of God and receive the light of Christ the Healer, bringing inner peace and assurance.

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There is one additional dimension of this light to explore this morning before this series comes to an end. The verses we heard Carl read speak to the ethical and prophetic dimensions of God's holy light. God sends the light into the world comes not only to bring comfort to our hearts, but to bring justice and healing to our world as well. Hear again: "Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness."

God sends the light and sparks it in our hearts as part of God's plan for working out God's purposes in the world—a light to the nations to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison, those who sit in darkness.

We are called to let God's light shine—in Haiti, in Louisiana, in the hungry hearts and homes of people right here in our neighborhoods. We are called to let God's light shine into the persistent racism that wounds the heart of our cities and nation. We are called to let God's light shine in the jails and prisons of our criminal justice system. We are called to let God's light shine into the lives of ever-escalating numbers of refugees throughout the world.

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It is light for all God's people, shining in us.

When I was a little girl, my grandfather Ted used to sing me old-timey church songs he'd learned as a boy in little country churches in southern Illinois. You know, I guess one of the reasons I believe we should teach children to sing our faith comes out of my own experience of the songs and hymns and anthems of the church taking root in my heart for as long as I can remember. You may not know this one—it's called "Jesus the Light of the World," written by George Elderkin and first appearing in his collection of hymns called "Songs for Help."

The chorus goes like this:

"We'll walk in the Light, beautiful Light,  
Come where the dewdrops of mercy shine bright.  
Shine all around us by day and by night,  
Jesus, the Light of the World."

Jesus said: "I am the light of world." I am the light that brings life to world and to all people. And this light, this light, the darkness can never overcome

May the dewdrops of mercy shine in our hearts this day, and the grace and mercy of God bring light to every place of shadow and darkness.

Notes:

Based on Rob Fuquay [The God We Can Know: Exploring the "I Am" Sayings of Jesus.](#) Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2014.

George D. Elderkin. "Jesus, the Light of the World." [Songs for Help: for the Sunday School, evangelistic and church services,](#) 1917.

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