

Into The Light

John 3:14-21

March 11, 2018

First United Methodist Church, Lindstrom

(This is a manuscript prepared for sermon delivery and may not represent actual words spoken.)

“But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”

This passage we read contains one of the more familiar verses...a verse many have committed to memory. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” I had a youth leader who encouraged us to also personalize that. “For God so loved me that God have his one and only Son, so that if I believe, I will have eternal life.”

We are also told in this passage that God did not send his Son for the purpose of condemning the world. So many followers of Jesus are quick to condemn this world. We must remember that God loves this world...God still loves this world...and God sent his Son to save this world. We need to believe that.

There is also in this passage a contrast between light and darkness. This is one of the themes that runs through John’s Gospel. Light and darkness. In the first chapter we are told that Jesus is life and light...and the light shines in the darkness...and the darkness does not understand or overpower the light...and John the Baptist came to testify to that light.

Our text begins with a reference to a story from the book of Numbers, the twenty-first chapter. The Israelites had been delivered from Egypt. They were travelling along towards the Promised Land. The people grew impatient. They were just that way. A grumbling, complaining lot. We often hear of the patience of Job. I’m more drawn to the patience of Moses. The people spoke against God and against Moses. They asked, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is

no water! And we detest this miserable food!” Really. They asked and said that.

So God had a moment. God sent poisonous snakes among the people. The snakes bit the people. Many of them died. The people said they had sinned when they grumbled. They asked that the snakes be removed. Moses intervened. God told Moses to make a snake and put it up on a pole. Anyone who was then bitten by a snake could take a look at the snake on the pole and live.

The issue was one of obedience. Jesus referenced that incident. It foreshadowed that the Son of Man would be lifted up and exalted. People who looked to him would be saved. Jesus is saying here that he is the cure for sin. We must look to him. It is only in looking to him that we will live.

That’s when we get the word that God so loved the world that he sent Jesus to save the world. We must believe in Jesus. If we believe in Jesus, then we have life. We must remember that God’s attitude towards us is always positive. So many want to paint God as this angry deity..., “sinners in the hands of an angry God”...as Jonathan Edwards wrote so long ago. Personally...I prefer to think of sinners in the hands of a loving God. God loves us. God’s desire is we look to Jesus and be saved.

But there are those who seem to prefer the darkness. So this light and dark thing. Light versus the darkness is a big theme in Scripture.

Right from the beginning. The book of Genesis. The creation story. Now the sun and the moon were not created until day four. But in the beginning...the very beginning...the description is there was formlessness...there was emptiness...there was darkness. God’s first

creative word was, “Let there be light.” Light was God’s answer for the darkness. In that story of creation, “evening” always precedes “morning”. “There was evening and there was morning” is the oft repeated statement...not “morning and evening”. Light ends darkness. The creation of light brought an end to formlessness and emptiness and darkness. I think that is pretty cool. How dark must have been the darkness before God said, “Let there be light.”

I know I’ve told this story before, but I like it...about the time I experienced literal total darkness. It made a lasting impression. There was that time when I lived in Kentucky and I went on a tour of a big cave. This cave was huge. We went way back and way down into that cave. A tour guide and lights led us. The tour guide led us into this room where light bulbs lit up the place. Then she turned the lights off. I tell ya...I would not have wanted to remain in that circumstance for too long. The darkness was almost suffocating. It was total blackness. Then the tour guide lit one match. It was amazing how the glow from that one match lit up the entire space. I was not the only one there who said as that match burned, “Let there be light.”

Now, repeating myself, I know, but come back to the Gospel of John. It begins with the same words as does Genesis. “In the beginning...” John talks about the Word...and that Word is Jesus...and Jesus is the light who shines in the darkness. The light here is more of a metaphor. Jesus is the light that shines in a fallen and empty world. Jesus is the light who shines in our sinful, fallen lives.

Then we move to our text and we are invited to place our faith in Jesus. We step from the darkness into the light and then believe. Now I would rather be in the light. Who wouldn’t? Who doesn’t prefer a bright, sunny day over a gloomy, cloudy one? Who would rather exist in the darkness rather than the light? According to our text, there are some who hate the light. And why do they hate the light? They are afraid. Of what are they afraid? They are afraid the light will show them for who and what they are...warts, stains, and all.

So what do we take away from this? Well...sure...light does expose us. But wouldn’t we still rather be in the light? John here says that those in the dark hate the light because they do evil stuff. If they come into the light, the evil they do will be exposed. Well...yeah, but John says before this that Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world...but to save the world. So if we come to the light and all our deeds are exposed, Jesus is not going to condemn us. But we must come to the light...draw nearer and nearer to the light.

You know, there are times when I can be a not-very-nice person. It’s true. I am very much aware of that. I can sometimes get frustrated when things do not unfold according to my so-called perfect plan. Know when I am most aware of this not-being-very nice sometimes? When I am around really nice people. They put me to shame. Now, don’t get me wrong. I can be nice, too...sometimes. But when I am around those super nice people, I see I could improve a bit.

There is this notion—a very mistaken notion—that the closer we get to Jesus...how do I put this...the closer we get to Jesus...the more we grow in our faith...like, the better we become. Listen! The closer we get to Jesus...the closer we get to Jesus who is holy...the closer we get to the pure light that is Jesus...well, the more we will see just how fallen we are. But that should not stop us from wanting to draw near to Jesus...because then we will realize more and more just how dependent we are upon his grace and his mercy and his love. We will see more and more that we are saved by grace through faith; we are not saved by what we do. And this is what God wants us to know.

I have talked to so many people—believe me, so many people—who have told me that they just can’t put their faith in Jesus because they have done such bad things. God could never forgive them. And I tell them that of course they have done bad things. They have sinned. We have all done bad things. We are all sinners. But then I ask them if they would rather live in the darkness and the emptiness of the bad things they have done. Or would they take a chance and step into the light and draw near to Jesus?

Sure...it might be a difficult first step. But Jesus will not condemn them. Jesus will save them. You just cannot beat a deal like that.

Today...it just does not matter what you have done...what bad or evil deeds. You can step out of the darkness of that...and step into the light. Jesus will not condemn you. It's true. Jesus will save you. You see, God loves you so much that he sent his only Son to die for you...not to condemn you...but to save you. You just need to step into the light and believe in him.

“But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”