

Sermon Text for December 24, 2022

Christmas Eve 8:00 PM Service

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Isaiah 9:2-7, John 1:1-14

“Jesus, the only light of the world”

So many of you have not been following as we have been on a journey together through the Ws of Christmas. Over these past four weeks we saw What Christmas – and we answered it with Emmanuel, God with us, God in flesh and dwelling among us. We saw Why Christmas and we realized that we are all sinners and so God had to come to be with us to free us from our sin. We saw Who Christmas and understood that Jesus did not and does not shy away from the messiness of life and he understood the complexities that we face because he faced them in his family as well. Last week we saw the When and where Christmas where we realized that for such a time as this God chose to be with us and so as a result for such a time as this God chose you to be here, God gave you purpose, God gave you a mission to follow here and now.

Tonight we will see Jesus as the only light of the world. I guess there is a W in there, but it really isn't part of the Ws series like tomorrow will be as we look at Wow Christmas. Both of our Scriptures have this beautiful interplay between light and dark. What makes it beautiful is that the light always conquers the darkness. There is no other evening like Christmas Eve where the very clear, visible, physical, tangible sign of Christ in a broken world is revealed for all to see in the candle shining in the darkness as this service reflects.

Over our time together here at First Presbyterian what we have seen is that none of this is academic or theoretical. What we do here is real and it affects us and impacts us once we leave this sanctuary and go out into the world. A little light dispels a lot of darkness. Even a single one of us can make a difference in the kingdom of God and that is what we are called to do. Our lives, as small and insignificant as they may be, can be a light in a broken world, this world, this community, in which we live.

Let's turn to Isaiah 9 and we will briefly highlight a few verses, starting with verse 2. The people and those who have lived walked in darkness for so long, the prophet Isaiah tells us, have seen a light and light has been given to them. This Messiah that we saw earlier who was anticipated from Isaiah 7 born to a virgin and called Emmanuel. As Paul states in Romans 8:22 the whole creation was groaning like a woman in child birth, in labor pains, for the coming of this Savior. This child has come. The darkness has felt overwhelming over time throughout

history and in also in our own individual journeys. We have been walking in it, but the light has come, and this light has shined.

When we get to verses 6-7 we see the impact that this light has upon the world. This light which was highly anticipated is described with a long list of attributes: Wonderful counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. These titles are matched with the reality that this newborn child will bring about. He will establish justice, righteousness. This will happen and this will take place we are sure with the coming of this babe born in a manger. This is a promise for the future, a future which will not come until Jesus comes back to be with us again. But the birth of this child to a virgin and placed in a manger we celebrate because the Messiah has come and brought us salvation.

When we get to John 1 we see that five times in these verses that we read Jesus is described as the light in a dark world that actively works to keep the world dark. The world is actively working to keep itself dark. It would be one thing if people would just stand by and not do anything, then at least the light would be able to shine and overcome the darkness. But when people actively work against justice and righteousness and mercy and grace and you name it, then the darkness is able to make itself felt.

When Jesus came upon this earth we find him described in vs.11 as the light that came to his own and his own people did not accept him. Remember in Luke 4:29, turn there now if you would, Jesus goes home and is asked to preach in his home church, his home synagogue. He does, and he reads from Isaiah 61 where he says God's spirit was upon him to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the prisoners persecuted by our criminal justice system, recover of sight to the blind, to let those oppressed by systemic injustices go free.

When he finishes the people that he knew at his home church, even his own family members rose up to drive him out simply because he was doing the will of God. People that he loved and that he thought loved him. Situational ethics will always lead to doing what you want and rarely to what God wants. The light that God shines is always consistent and doesn't waver or change as a result of the situation in which you find yourself. Grace is grace.

Jesus is the only light of the world and the only one who can provide a relationship with God that is transformative and that leads to eternal life and that also leads to a consistent life ethic that doesn't change depending on what vested interest you have. Jesus as the light that shines on others we see in John three times. In John 3:19 Jesus states that people loved darkness

rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.

We are an open book here in this church. So when we do evil at least everyone will see it. When we make a mistake at least we can strive to correct it. When we see an opportunity to rectify something we take it. I am so pleased that the session at our last meeting voted to maintain the social ministry position from inheritances that we will be receiving. I don't know of any other church that is actively working to be a light in the community in a way that places funding for the community on the table.

In John 8:12 Jesus says I am the light of the world after he forgives the adulteress who was about to be stoned. We see the same statement made by Jesus in John 9:5. This exclusive claim that Jesus is the only light of the world is seen in John 14 as he states that no one can come to Father except by me. My sermon title reflects that exclusivity that Jesus is the light that no one else is and that no other ethical construct can recreate. Jesus is Jesus, and only Jesus can provide the life and the light that we need.

Unless we remain falsely satisfied in merely believing in this light, what we find in vs.12 is a statement that ought to unsettle us from our comfort this evening. To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God. Some here may not want to have this power. I just want to go home and curl up in bed and open my presents in the morning. But this title that we have all received by the light of the world, by the one who was the Christ child, is child of God.

Our primary responsibility as children of the one and only true light, is to shine that light upon others. Like a city on a hill we are to be the ones that others can look to in order to discover what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ, what does it mean when we say that we have been filled with his fullness of grace upon grace. Do our actions reflect an overabundance of grace that is willing and able to put ourselves at risk in front of a mob who is looking to stone an adulteress, put the light on Jesus through our words and actions that only results in grace.

A child has been born for us, a son given to us, and authority rests upon his shoulders, the light of the world. Jesus. Amen.