

I AM...

The Guiding Light

Frankton – 2/14/16

Scripture: John 8.12-19 I am the light

Proposition: Jesus is the light of the world and wants us to be the light to this world.

We are starting a Lenten sermon series that I have titled: [SLIDE] I AM. For the seven Sunday in Lent, we are going to study the “I am” sayings of Jesus that occur in the gospel of John. In seven different situations, Jesus refers to himself as something by saying “I am...” Here’s the list: light, gate, good shepherd, bread, true vine, way, and resurrection. So here we go with our first “I am”: the light.

Do you remember this old TV show intro? “And now, The Guiding Light.” “The Guiding Light” was the longest running drama of all time. It came on the air in 1937 five days after President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s second inauguration. It then lasted some 18,000 episodes and 72 years, finally ending in 2009. The series was created by Irna Phillips who based it on her personal spiritual experiences of having given birth to a still-born baby and finding comfort in listening to on-air sermons. These sermons provided the nucleus upon which the original show was based. The Guiding Light refers to a lamp in the study of a minister who would turn it as a sign for the residents to find help when needed. Over the years the preacher was removed, the Christian message dissipated and the inspirational themes evolved into typical soap opera exploitations and glorifications of sin. Even the “the” was removed and the light went from being exclusive and singular to being just a “Guiding Light” among many guiding lights.

Light was important to the Jews during the [SLIDE] Festival of the Booths also known as the Feast of the Tabernacles. This is Israel’s Thanksgiving feast in which they acknowledge the fall harvest and God’s provision for them. It is happy celebration and a time of joy and rejoicing. This feast also remembers Israel’s deliverance from Egypt and their wandering in the wilderness for forty years. During the Exodus time, Israel lived in tents and worshiped at the Tabernacle which was also a tent. To remember this time during the Festival of Booths, the Jews build small tabernacles or booths. For seven days they were to live in these booths as a vivid reminder of the days in the wilderness living in tents. One last feature of the feast that I want to lift up was illumination of the Temple. The pilgrims who came to the Temple would bring lights and torches. Also the Temple’s golden lamps stands would also be lighted illuminating the entire Temple.

It was during this time that Jesus entered into Jerusalem. In the middle of the week he began to teach at the temple. The ordinary Jews who heard him were amazed at his teachings, but the Jewish authorities were angered by his teachings. They would debate a lot of issues with Jesus over the next three days. Some wanted to proclaim him as Messiah. Others wanted him arrested and killed.

At the end of the festival, as the pilgrims began to pack things away to travel home and the lights had been extinguished, Jesus began teaching again. In the midst of his teaching some scribes and Pharisees brought before him a woman caught in the act of adultery. They reminded him that the Law of Moses required her to be stoned to death. Then they asked him what he wanted them to do with her. [SLIDE] Jesus bent down and began to write in the dirt. No one knows what was

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written but I think maybe he began to write a list of sins that her accusers had committed. He gave them a chance to read the list and then said "Let anyone of you without sin throw the first stone." Then he started writing again. The accusers began dropping their stones and walking away until only the woman stood there. Then Jesus stood up again and asked the woman which of her accusers condemned her. She tells him that none did – a fact Jesus already knew, then he told her that he didn't condemn her either and to go and sin no more.

Immediately after this, our scripture today begins. Jesus turns to the people and makes this declaration: [SLIDE] *I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.* [12] To understand this declaration of "I am" we must travel back into time to a place in the desert at the base on Mount Sinai. A shepherd named Moses is watching over his father-in-law's sheep. He spots a bush that is on fire but is not being consumed. Out of curiosity, he approaches it and a voice from the bush calls his name. Moses answers and begins to get instructions that he is to go deliver God's people from the oppression they are suffering in Egypt. Moses asks, "Who should I say sent me?" God replies "I Am Who I Am. Tell them 'I Am' has sent me to you." [EX 3.14]

The hebrew word is "haya". (hay-yaw) It meant existing, being. God says tell them the one, who exists, who has always existed, and will forever more exist has sent you. The only one who can fulfill this role has sent you. Jesus uses the same term haya (hay-yaw), the word God used in revealing himself to Moses. He is declaring that his very existence makes him the Light of the World. He is declaring that he and God are one. That he is God.

To understand this light that he claimed to be, we must first understand darkness. While at this time of year, the days are getting longer, I'm still not a fan. I want the days to be lots longer like they are in June. And I know I'm not the only one who feels this way. Jan is like a lot of you who right now are driving to work in the dark and then driving home in the dark. That just stinks. God does not like darkness either. In Genesis it states that God's first words over the primordial morass were: Let there be light. And there was light. And God saw that the light was good. [1.3]

God separated the light from the darkness. God separated that which was good from that which was not good. Remember those men screaming for the adulteress woman to be stoned? They were acting from the darkness within their hearts. Jesus shown the light of righteousness into their hearts exposing their own sins and they were convicted. *I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.* [12] Hear the gentleness of that invitation. It's not condemning. he told the adulteress woman "I do not condemn you." he wanted to put light into her life.

Have you ever been where it was truly dark – no light? I've been on tours of caves where they turned out the lights so you could experience what total darkness feels like. Have you ever been out camping or somewhere away from the city lights on a night where the clouds keep the stars and the moon from shining? It's really dark. This was the darkness of Jesus' time. There were no electric lights, no street lamps. When the sun went down, people did too. They closed themselves off from the outside world making it dangerous for anyone traveling at night. The world at night was truly dark. Jesus said: *I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.*

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There are times in our lives when darkness will prevail. We will struggle with sin issues. We will struggle with circumstances. We will struggle with our faith. Jesus said: *I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.*

It's easy to follow Jesus when its daylight and things are all fluffy like a cloud. But it is in the darkness that he shines the brightest. Often when we are struggling with issues in our lives we do not want to travel with Jesus anymore. Jesus makes it possible to continue to follow him in those dark times. Psalm 119:105 states: *Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.* When you are struggling, read the Book of Psalms and let the word guide you and show you the path to take.

When you turn away from the light of the world, you become confused and allow your mind to become darkened. You begin to wander far from the life that God has planned for you. You close your mind to sound doctrine and harden your heart toward God and all who try to lead you in truth. You lose all shame and pursue everything that gives you pleasure even if it is impure. You distort the truth to fit your lifestyle. And then wonder why you feel empty. But Jesus said: *I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.* God is not just a God of second chances. God is a God of second and third and fourth chances everyday.

So as followers of Jesus we have the assurance that he will light up the world around us so that we do not have to walk in the darkness of sin. However, we realize that Jesus never gives us power that he does not want us to use. We have the Light of the World living inside of us. What do we do with it? In Matthew, Jesus called us to be the light of the world. He said we are like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. [SLIDE] Then he cautioned us by talking about hiding our light under a basket. He wants us to let our light shine for all to see. [5.14-16]

Since we have the Light of the World we are to become the Light of the World. In this dark world of dishonest and immoral people we are to live clean, innocent, caring, joy filled lives. We are to display our lives to all around us. So, the question is not "Do we have the light?" but rather "How much light do we shine?" Are you like a city on a hill that cannot be hidden? Perhaps you are more like a flashlight. You give off just enough light to direct someone in the darkness but not willing to release all the light you have. Some may be like a match, giving off just enough light to point someone in the right direction without any commitment on your part. Our lifestyle determines how much light we are willing to release. Lights will light up everything in a room including our own shortcomings.

We need to do a spiritual inventory this morning. Jesus proposes a serious question here. Do you really have the Light of the World shining in you? Or have you substituted the truth with you own imaginations of what the truth is? What do your words reflect? What does your lifestyle reflect? What does your attitude reflect? Do they reflect the true Light? Jesus said: [SLIDE] *I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.* Do you have The Guiding Light of Jesus or just a guiding light that the world offers?

