

John 8: 12-20  
"Shine a Light on Me"  
July 22, 2018  
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In 2015, a band called Banners released a single called *Shine a Light*. Some of the song's lyrics capture the essence of Jesus words in this morning's text. They are as follows:

*Light will lead the way, will set you free.  
'Cause I'm only looking for a little peace  
And when the light falls  
Oh, call on me  
Just don't forget to show me some mercy*

*Shine a light on me  
'Cause I was lost at sea  
While the waves were dragging me underneath  
Shine a light on me*

*Searching for some grace I'll tell you now  
If I could hear your voice  
How sweet the sound*

*(Woah) shine a light on  
Shine a light on me  
'Cause I was lost at sea  
While the waves were dragging me underneath  
Shine a light on me*

In this morning's text, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

It's one of Jesus' "I Am" sayings about himself in John's gospel. These I Am sayings are important to John for they are self-declaration placed on the lips of Jesus to teach the reader and the church which follows who it is they follow. They are also important because they are emphatic in the way they are written. In the Greek it is ego eimi (ego = I + eimi = I Am therefore the I is thought of as having a heavy emphasis or if written it could be thought of as bold font). It is I am...the bread of life (we've heard thus far in John's gospel).

Today, it is, I am the light of the world.

Now, to keep context, we are still within the Festival of Tabernacles (or Booths).

There were two rituals that occurred during this Festival – one having to do with water and the other having to do with light. Rev. Wright walked us through the water ritual two weeks ago and you find that online in print or archived on the live stream.

Today, we look at the light side of this Festival.

The Mishnah – one of Judaism’s first major canonical documents following the Bible – notes that the gathered community would light four large lampstands in the Temple Court of the Women at the close of each day during the Festival.

Celebrants at the Festival would dance before the candlesticks with burning torches adding more light to the joyous celebration.

Let’s put this statement in context of the gospel itself.

If we agree with scholarship that last week’s text 7:52-8:11 is an addition to John’s gospel and not part of the original document, then Jesus words come on the Pharisees declaration of Jesus in 7:52, “...search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.”

Jesus and the Pharisees are still embroiled in their conflicted dialogue. F.D. Bruner calls it *confrontational continuity* which is a much nicer and academic way of saying *fighting*. You can use that some time, “No, we’re not still fighting. We’re engaged in a bit of *confrontational continuity*.)

The Pharisees anti-Galilean assertion is met by Jesus emphatic declaration,

“I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

Jesus is declaring himself to be the true fulfillment of Tabernacles/Booths joy.

Jesus declaration is also a claim to fulfill Isaiah 9:1-2,

“...people who walked in darkness

Have seen a great light

Those who lived in a land of deep darkness

On them light has shined...”

In this statement, the Church Fathers ask us to notice:

Jesus is not saying I am the light of Angels or of Heaven...

Jesus is saying I am the light of the world (i.e. we who live in darkness...we who walk in the shadow of death.)

Martin Luther, says of this declaration, “[Jesus] is implying, ‘Darkness rules wherever [He] is not...Whenever I am [Jesus] extinguished, no one sees anything.’”

John Calvin believed that we truly “get it” when we admit this world is darkness and we are blind. Christ, he would say, is not speaking of what he holds in common with us. Rather, Christ is claiming light is uniquely his own. Outside of Christ there is not even a spark of true light.

As one theologian puts it (Henry), “Just as one Sun enlightens the whole world, so does Christ. Without the sun the earth becomes like a dungeon, so it is a life without Christ.”

Raymond Brown speaks of it in the following way...Christ is the incarnate revealer of God’s light shining forth which gives humanity knowledge of purpose & meaning of life.

It’s a bit of an existential situation which this statement captures (see Schnackenburg). Darkness characterizes the life of the person who lacks the light of God’s saving revelation. This, in turn, leads to a sense of life lived without ultimate goal or over-arching direction. Which, ultimately, leans toward hopelessness which is at the mercy of inevitable death.

In this claim by Jesus, John is, once more, taking us back to the prologue.

“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.” (John 1.4-5)

John is also providing us with the language of discipleship – *Akoloutheo* – follow.

This too takes us back to the prologue.

“The next day, John [the Baptizer] was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, ‘Look, here is the Lamb of God!’

The two disciples heard his say this, and they *followed* Jesus.” (John 1.35-37)

According to John’s gospel, the proper response to Jesus is to follow.

As one follows one begins to discover darkness subsides as life takes on a new light.

Something else of note is happening here in Jesus’ remarks concerning light.

Something which connects with Jesus claim to know where he is from and where he is going.

Something which connects with Jesus claim alluded to in this morning’s text and discussed earlier in John 5.19ff when Jesus appealed to his unity with the Father, “...the Son can only do what he sees his Father doing...”

Jesus’ unity with the Father seen in chapter 5 and highlighted here in chapter 8, is the key to understanding the mysteries of John’s gospel.

It is also key to understanding Jesus’ ability to make a claim on his own behalf that He is the light of the world & that anyone who follows him will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

C.H. Dodd helps us by explaining how light & light alone in all creation is self-evidencing.

all other things are seen and known by means of light...

light is known by itself alone...

*phos photi blepetai (Light by Light is seen)*

“Thus,” Dodd claims, “[the] real meaning behind Jesus reply is that His claim is self-evidencing [like light’s].”

Thus, Jesus actions are luminous – living proof which bears witness to God as God’s incarnate love at work in this world.

Perhaps, it is like the young shepherd boy who spent many an afternoon interacting with another boy who would stop by around the lunch hour.

One afternoon, the two were staring heavenward at the clouds and the shepherd boy sat up, pointed to the castle on the hill and said, “I wonder what the king who lives in that castle is like. Is he nice? Is he benevolent? What kind of a King is he?”

With that, the other boy sat up and said, “Well, perhaps you already know. For, you see, the king is my father and I am his son. If you know me, then you know him.”

To see Jesus is to see God.

To know Jesus is to know God.

With that knowledge comes that by which our lives are judged.

Lest we recoil at that word judged or judgment, let us not forget the Gospel is clear that Jesus rather than bringing judgment brings rescue, salvation, life, hope, light...

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3.16-17)

Lest we take Gospel grace for granted, let us not forget that our encounter with this one who brings light and life has a convicting effect on us.

“Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (John 3.18)

Luther likened this to one’s encounter with a Physician.

When we see the Doctor, we understand the Medical Practitioner does not enter the room with the intent to hurt us.

If we decide to not follow the Doctor’s advice or to stop going altogether, then we sentence our self to sickness over health.

The fault is not the Physician’s. The fault is ours for not following the prescription.

Jesus says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

Will we follow?

Will the Banners’ words be our banner words...

*Light will lead the way, will set you free.  
‘Cause I’m only looking for a little peace  
And when the light falls*

*Oh, call on me  
Just don't forget to show me some mercy*

*Shine a light on me  
'Cause I was lost at sea  
While the waves were dragging me underneath  
Shine a light on me*

*Searching for some grace I'll tell you now  
If I could hear your voice  
How sweet the sound*

*Shine a light on me  
'Cause I was lost at sea  
While the waves were dragging me underneath  
Shine a light on me*

Amen & Amen.