

## 021923 – Transfiguration – Sermon - “Carrying the Light”

This is the last Sunday of Epiphany – a season filled with images of light – a star to follow, lessons about lights that shine in the night and lights that shouldn’t be hidden under bushels. In John we hear that Jesus says, “I am the light of the world; and in Matthew Jesus says, “You are the light of the world”. We are urged to be both salt and light... Epiphany is a season of Light.

The image of light in our Biblical scriptures isn’t restricted to Epiphany, of course. In fact, right in the first chapter of Genesis we read:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.”

Light is the very first thing to come into being in our creation story! And Wikipedia tells me that there are 235 passages in the Bible about light. So, I think we better take being called to be the light of the world very seriously!

What makes light such a powerful image for followers of Jesus? Let’s consider the properties and the uses of light...

The first thing that comes to mind, I think, is that light dispels darkness. When we are in total darkness, it’s impossible to see anything. It is dangerous to be moving about when you can’t see any obstacles in your way or to avoid things that might trip you up. It’s hard to tell what direction you are moving in or even which way is up or down! Trying to carry on in darkness is difficult, it’s dangerous, and it can be very scary. Light makes a big difference – even just a small light like a nightlight, or even the glow in the sky from a city or town. A porch light or a light in a window can lead us home. Headlights on our cars can keep us from harming ourselves or others, they can keep us squarely on the road.

Light exposes things. More than just showing what is familiar around us, it can show us the things that might be hidden in dark corners or underneath things. It can expose little defects in something that at first glance seems just fine. Neil is renovating our basement these days and that involves a lot of drywalling. Even when he thought the taping and mudding, sanding and priming of the walls in the new bedroom were done to perfection, he used a light this week to expose the small defects that required a bit more work to make them smooth and blemish free.

Light certainly helps us see things clearly.

Light, in fact, rules over darkness. Think about it. We can add a bit of light to a place to get rid of the dark, but we can’t add a bit of darkness to a room to get rid of the light.

Light gives life. Most living organisms in our world require light to survive and to grow. We have all seen what happens to plants that are deprived of light or put in a place where the light isn't suitable. It's true for animals too – even us humans. Living as we do in a part of the world where there is less sunlight for a good part of the year can lead to a condition known as seasonal affective disorder. Its acronym, SAD, is very fitting as the symptoms include a persistent low mood, a loss of pleasure or interest in normal everyday activities, feeling irritable, feelings of despair, guilt and worthlessness, low self-esteem, and tearfulness. It is a disorder that is certainly very sad! And one of the main treatments for this is – you guessed it – light therapy.

According to research, even a little sunlight – just 15 minutes a day – can give you many health benefits like better sleep, stronger bones, and a stronger immune system.

Light has healing properties too. Exposure to sunlight breaks down the bilirubin that causes some newborn babies to be jaundiced. Sunlight can help inflammatory skin conditions such as psoriasis, eczema, and acne, and it has even been shown to help autoimmune diseases like arthritis.

Light can give warmth. Even a bitterly cold day in winter feels less harsh if the sun is shining brightly. My little Yorkie is very sensitive to cold. She moves around our house, and my office here in the church, following little patches of sunlight to keep her warm. My daughter keeps her new baby chicks warm with a brooding lamp. And every year thousands of Canadians head south to sunnier climates to warm their winter-weary bones.

Light is beautiful. Who doesn't love a bright sunny morning, or the wonder of stars at night? We use candle light to set a quiet mood; we use coloured lights to decorate our homes for the holidays; we light up the sky with fireworks to celebrate special occasions. Light can even split into a rainbow after rain or when traveling through a prism, showing us all the amazing diversity of colours that we would otherwise never have known existed. What a beautiful miracle that is!

There are even kinds of light that we cannot see that give us many advantages – like x-rays and infra-red rays and ultraviolet rays – all lights working out of sight of the human eye.

So many wonderful things about light! No wonder it holds such a place in the teachings of our scriptures. As good followers of Jesus who want to help build the Kingdom of God here in the world, we hope to be able to do all of these things too – to dispel darkness... to expose injustices... to be life-giving... to heal others, ourselves, and the world... to provide warmth and beauty. It's a great image to illustrate all of the lessons we need to learn in order to be the kind of people who can change the world for the better.

But, I am sure many of you are sitting here thinking about how light can also be less than helpful, even harmful – so let's think about that too.

A bright light shone in the eyes of a person or animal can actually be blinding... too much sun can dry up a plant, or burn the skin, or cause cancer... too much sunlight without moisture can

go beyond warming to causing a fire big enough to devastate hundreds of acres of forests or homes... x-rays, infra-red, and ultraviolet lights can be extremely dangerous if not used properly.

There is a lesson here for us too, I think. Being the light in the world is more than just getting out there to shine with all our might. We need to understand when, and where, and how to use that light in order to make positive change without causing even more harm... We need to shine our light without obliterating the other lights that are shining around us... We need to remember that light is made up of many beautiful colours, not just the ones we think are the prettiest... and, we need to remember that sometimes the light that is needed most is the kind of light that is not obvious to the naked eye.

“I am the Light” said Jesus... and “You are the Light” he added. There’s a lot to learn if we are going to be the kind of light that is needed to build God’s kin-dom here in this earthly place we call home.

We are called to carry the Light of Christ into this hurting world. We can only do this by first knowing what that light looks like and what power it holds... We carry the Light by surrounding ourselves in everything that light means, and by feeling the profound effects of what it gives to our lives... only then will we be prepared to take that Light out into the world.

On the day that Peter, James, and John saw Jesus in a brand-new light – a light so powerful that he was changed forever – transfigured – in their eyes, their own lives were transformed. I want us to think about all the times in our lives where we have had those “aha!” moments, moments when the light came on, or we “saw the light” or we experienced a “flash” of understanding. These moments in our lives often lead to change – change in what we understand, change in what we believe, and change in how we move on or behave in the world. These moments don’t happen just once in a lifetime, but many times if we keep our eyes, our minds, and our hearts open. The most powerful moments like this are the ones that go beyond making us say, “Wow!”, to making us eager to make a difference in the world around us – to make us eager to carry that light with us.

As we leave this season of Epiphany and begin our Lenten journey toward the cross, we might be tempted to feel that we are moving from light into darkness, but let’s remember that we can – and that we have been *commissioned* by Jesus - to not leave this Epiphany light behind us but to carefully carry it with us on this difficult journey by

Knowing the light,

Walking in the light, and

Being the light.

May it be so. Amen.