

**The Light Shines in the Darkness**  
**Pastor Jim Cords**  
**January 3, 2021**

The holy gospel for today comes to us from the Gospel of John, the first chapter:

In the beginning the Word already existed.  
The Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.  
He existed in the beginning with God.  
God created everything through him,  
and nothing was created except through him.  
The Word gave life to everything that was created,  
and his life brought light to everyone.  
The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness can never extinguish it.

The gospel of the Lord. Please pray with me. Lord Jesus, please bring your light into our lives. Allow it to lift us, to give us insight, wisdom, and joy as we follow and serve you in the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We are excited to begin a new series with this Sunday. The series is entitled "The Light Shines in the Darkness." It's rooted here in this Gospel of John, but it extends throughout the scripture. This wonderful news that Jesus is the light of the world and that we are sent in His name as light in the world. We're going to be exploring that for the next several weeks. We hope you will find it illuminating, pun intended.

God is indeed with us and brings light and life into our lives. This Gospel of John begins with these words "In the beginning." It is, of course, a harkening back to the first words of the Holy Scripture in Genesis which begin in the same way. So we're being taught right from the start of this Gospel of John that this will be a new creation, a new beginning, a new reality within God's creation.

John begins with a stunning description. These words "in the beginning" would have been shocking to the people who were listening. First because of its connection to Genesis and every Jewish believer would have recognized that, but also and secondly that Jesus is considered the Word, the *Logos* and that was an amazing statement and proclamation from John. Both Greek and Jewish listeners of the first century would understand that this title carries profound meaning. Greeks would have thought of the seminal forces that sustain the universe. That's how they understood *Logos*. And Jews, of course, would have understood that this was bringing to mind the creation story. As the words continue, this assertion that creation itself comes through Jesus, an unbelievable statement that

causes us to come to that place where we submit ourselves to the truth of the gospel and believe its proclamation because it is true, not, certainly because we can fully understand it.

Then there's this amazing word about Word. In the creation story, we see the phrase that God uses and God said let there be light, animals, whatever, and it was. God literally, in the beginning, speaks, uses words to create and now we hear that Jesus is the Word, that Jesus shares the same essence with God. The Son existed before time. Now, how does that make sense, when you're talking about a baby that was born as we are in this Christmas season? Jesus existed before He was born. He was the agent of all creation. John, in his gospel, anchors it in this truth, that is, that Jesus is God. Jesus is divine. So in Christ, in the Incarnation, we meet the very God of creation. There's a connection here to the words of wisdom in the Old Testament, the divine wisdom that existed from before time and that now can be known by us in the person of Jesus.

Let us look at these words. "The Word gave life to everything that was created and his life brought light to everyone." The Lord is the creator and we are the created.

As we consider this new series, "The Light Shines in the Darkness," my mind first went literally to light and dark, flashlights, dimmers, the torch that I use when I do night diving when I'm scuba diving, things that allow us to see in the dark, to give us an opportunity not to be lost or to bump into things. Then I thought about the darkness of depression and the fact that there are so many in our community that are struggling these days, with the isolation that Covid has brought on and the darkness of loss that is the truth of this pandemic. So I started to think about what kinds of hopeful things might I say in this sermon. What would I want to proclaim to you, to bring the word of hope, to bring light into our darkness. Not long after that, I began to look at the scripture, and to study what it has to say. Much more helpful than anything I would have to say.

So we look to the truth of scripture and its use of the word "light." The scripture uses it as a metaphor, for order and for truth. In the beginning, when God created light, it's telling us in the creation story that God is bringing order to chaos, and light to the darkness. He is bringing order to our world. It's an order that again we understand that it carries this truth that God is the Creator and we are the created. God is the one who puts the world in order and we live in the order, in the rule, in the authority of our Creator. We're intended to learn from the truth of Genesis and we're intended to learn from this truth in the Gospel of John that we receive the blessing of God's presence and the blessing of God's light, His power, His authority, His creative work in our midst. It isn't us who do the work of God. It's God who does His work, blessedly sometimes, through us. God is the creator. We are the created.

So we think about darkness and we hear in the words here in John the darkness can never extinguish the light. I love that idea. That the light can scatter the darkness but the darkness cannot extinguish the light. Darkness in these texts has an element of a lack of understanding, an ignorance, if you will,

an absence of truth. The real meaning of this text, in actuality, is this. The darkness has not understood the light. The darkness cannot comprehend it, which is interesting. If the darkness cannot grasp the light, then how does that symbolism work for us? The Greek word, *katalambano* can mean either understand, (the darkness cannot *understand* the light) or it can mean being hostile to the light.

In truth, throughout John's gospel, it often carries this sense of hostility, so that we're led to believe and hear in this proclamation that the darkness cannot be victorious over the light, that the darkness of our world is not able to cancel out or extinguish the light of God. Darkness would try to destroy Jesus, but it would fail. The light would successfully bring salvation to the world.

It's important for us to look at this. The dark things that happen in our lives don't change the reality of the good that also happens. Darkness does not extinguish our light. When evil happens in our world, it will not stand in the end. Rather, the goodness of God will be victorious. That's the promise of the Gospel. That's the hope that we can anticipate as we move forward into our world which is sometimes a very dark place.

This reference to light and darkness continues to draw on the motifs of the Genesis story, where we see not only God bringing light into the darkness of the world, but then we see in the story of salvation that unfolds as the darkness of sin and brokenness happen in the Fall and from the Fall. It's in that Fall, against that background then, that Jesus is the light that comes into the world to redeem, to restore, to bring us back to God's original intent for his creation, to be in fellowship with Him and not separated by this darkness of our world. The light that shows the very presence of God, in all His goodness, in all His faithfulness and love.

Darkness here in these verses points to the world that is estranged from God, spiritually ignorant and blind, if you will. This darkness cannot comprehend the goodness of God without Jesus. Without Jesus, our world doesn't understand the goodness and love of God. It is in the dark. It is blind to the goodness of God and neither knows nor does it have any regard for God.

So what is to happen? How do we understand this proclamation of John's gospel as Good News? Well, it's not just an image of a flashlight. It's not just an idea of being kind or being nice. It's actually that God's word is effective. God speaks and things come into being. By speech, He not only related to us in the words of the prophets, but now, He makes Himself known to us in the words of holy scripture, even as they make the Word, Jesus, known to us and to the world. Jesus is the Word, but you and I only know Jesus through the word that is the Holy Scriptures. Through the Holy Spirit, God continues to speak into our lives and yes, even to speak into our darkness. Through the word that is the Bible, we are brought light to shine into our darkness, as it reveals Jesus and our calling as His disciples.

As we journey forward into this new year, it is my hope and prayer that we will continue to grow to understand God's Word, that it too can bring light to us, to our families, and to the world in which we live, that we might use God's Word as a light to light our path, as we seek to figure out how to live our lives in this time and in this place with today's challenges.

One of the great concepts of Christianity, this idea of new life is found 36 times in the Gospel of John and no other book contains it more than 17 times. So this idea of the life we have in Christ is central to John's gospel. It's important that we see it and notice it, that the Christ does bring us life and new life. The idea of life is not just that we breathe, but that we live with purpose and meaning, that Jesus coming into the world to make God known to us, and to bring us into relationship with Him, brings purpose and meaning back into our lives, a purpose that is often lost in our sin and brokenness, but is recovered in the forgiveness and presence of God to lead and guide us through the Holy Spirit. It's not a purpose that we choose for ourselves or that we discover in ourselves, rather it is a purpose given to us by God, a purpose for which we are both chosen and gifted, and to be honest, it's something we need every day.

So when we ask about today? What is my purpose today? What is our purpose today? What do we do now? We find an incredible example in our Old Testament lesson today in King Solomon. Let's look at that story. Imagine if God came to you and said, "What do you want? Whatever you ask, I'll give it to you." Boy, my mind goes in all sorts of different directions and I'll be honest, too many of them materialistic. But Solomon was extraordinarily wise apparently already because what he acknowledged was not what he wanted, but rather what he needed. Solomon recognized that he was ignorant. The word "young child" is another way of saying it. He was inexperienced and he was acknowledging that, while God had made him king, in line with his father David, he had no idea what to do to fulfill this new role that he had been given, this new purpose for his life, to be the king of God's people, Israel. So instead of asking for something he wanted, he asked for that which he desperately needed – wisdom. God, show me how to see the difference between right and wrong. Show me how to lead your people well. That's quite a dream. It's a dream that had fulfillment. It is not just a dream that sometimes we have, that you have one night and you forget and go on your way. It's a dream that was Solomon's encounter with God who said not only will I give you the very thing you asked for, I will make you wiser than anyone else in all creation, but I, at the same time, will bless you for those things you did not ask for.

I want to suggest to you God does that very same thing for us. He gives us what we need to do that which He asks us, calls us, to do. He gives us gifts. He gives us people around us to strengthen us, to encourage us, even to teach us and train us, so that we can go about the tasks that God has for us, so we can be the witness He calls us to be, so that we can touch lives for Him in the way that the gospel teaches us, by loving our neighbor as ourselves, by treating others with the goodness that God has treated us, with grace and favor and unmerited blessing.

Life, though, is a long journey and unfortunately Solomon even in his later life began to lose his way. The ebbs and flows of our own life and our own faith require us not to just ask one day like “Today, God guide me,” but to admit our need for God every day. We don't simply need the Light that came into the world in the Incarnation of Jesus. We also need the light that is in us through the Holy Spirit, as we live by faith each day, as we humbly acknowledge before God each day, as Solomon did in our texts, that we don't know what today brings, so we have no idea how to handle it, how to deal with it.

What is God's will for me today as various things happen around me? We begin to be reminded by the Holy Spirit of God's Word. We begin to seek for the promptings of the Holy Spirit as we walk through each day asking how can I be a blessing? How can I allow the light of Christ's love in me to shine through me, so that others might also experience, at my hand, through my words, in the look on my face, the love that God has for them or Jesus came for the world to love, to redeem, to forgive, to restore, to bring light into their darkness. They don't understand the text tells us this morning and yet, we as believers are given at least a glimpse of understanding that we then can share with the world.

The Ephesians text that we look at today actually tells us that we are chosen. It, again going back to the creation story, suggests that before the world was even created, God chose me and chose you for this purpose of being His children, being His disciples, being His light in the world. God chose Solomon to follow King David and we learn from God's word in Ephesians that He also chooses us. He chose us in advance and He makes everything work out according to His plan.

Now, that's good news for a new year! He makes everything work out according to His plan. It's all going to work out. God's got this. That's a really good reminder, not only today, but tomorrow and every day after that. God's got this.

There's another way to hear this. I'll read it now from the English Standard Version. “In Him, we have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.” Well, Greek is not easy; sometimes English is not easy, and sometimes it's just easier to go with the easier version. He works out everything according to His will, but it's important to remember that it isn't just simple. It isn't Pollyanna. It's, in fact, the daily presence of God in the joys of life and in the struggles of life, giving us insights along the way, giving others around us insights along the way, so that God can speak through our brothers and sisters into our lives, to make us aware of the opportunities that are before us, to remind us of His love and His forgiveness, of our value to Him and to the work of the church that He calls us to do. It isn't simple. It isn't easy. It isn't just a matter of putting a smile on our faces and “yay, everything's going to be fine.” It's a daily recognition of our need for God, a daily seeking, a daily looking for the signs and ways in which God will work in us, to speak words of encouragement, to literally put courage in us to face the challenges of the day.

I believe God's word is full of examples that we can learn from, bad examples - don't do that and good examples - that's the right path, that we can see and learn from, so that we don't have to learn from our own mistakes. We don't have to acquire our own bruises and broken bones in order to see the Truth that is before us, in the lives of scripture, in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ, as we walk together as God's people into this reality of the world in which we live. Then it says this. He did this so that we would praise and glorify Him, so we could just rejoice in the goodness of God, because light overcomes darkness.

Darkness never overcomes light and we're told that this happens for us as we are united with Christ because we are joined to Christ in baptism and in faith. We recognize that we are children of God and our Father is looking out for us and the Holy Spirit is there to comfort and encourage and guide. So, as we ask this question, how can we be light in the darkness of this world, we're reminded that we are only that because Christ is the light and he makes His light shine through us, through His spirit. Because we are united with Christ, we both have Christ, the Light of the world, but we are a light to the world.

Our text in Ephesians tells us that this is a mystery. That is, the darkness, the world apart from Christ, does not comprehend this and so it refers us to this revelation that happens in the life of Jesus to his apostles, and to those who have learned through the apostles the truth of the Gospel. It is now made known to us that Jesus is in fact how God will bring hope to the world, how he will bring restoration and forgiveness, how he will cast out bitterness and darkness through love and sacrifice, the mystery of God's will revealed in Christ.

Now I know I'm in trouble here because I know again people who are apart from Christ view this as the arrogance of the Church. We know we're far from perfect. We know that we're guilty sometimes of bringing darkness into situations because of the way we behave, but it doesn't change the truth of who God is and a part of that truth is not only that He can use us, broken, hateful sometimes, lost sometimes, confused sometimes people and redeem us such that we know that same word of Hope is true for everyone. There is no darkness so dark that the Light of Christ cannot shine into it. There is no despair so deep that the hope of God is not able to lift it. There is no brokenness so broken but the love of Christ will not come to make it right and good. It is not about us being right and the world being wrong. It's about all of us, needing God to come as He does in Jesus, to let His light shine, to let order and truth come into our lives and into our world, so that our hope is restored, so that our life is restored, so that our purpose and our gifts are given and used to be a part of that work of restoration that God is doing in His world today. The mystery of God's will now be revealed in Christ to unite all things in Him. 2021 will be a year in which we let the truth and light of Jesus bring order to the chaos of our world. 2021 will be a year in which we see that darkness cannot extinguish the light. The light shines in the darkness. Thanks be to God. Amen