

A Light in the Darkness

John 1:1-5, 9-14 (NIV)

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

"In the beginning," God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the surface of the deep. And God said, "Let there be light" and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. (Genesis 1:3-4) The first words God recorded for us is him creating light for the world, light that was separated from the darkness, light that would show what was being made, light needed for the people he would make five days later.

We need light. We need it to see where we are going, to see what we are doing. If we didn't have light, we would just stumble around in darkness hoping for a best-case scenario of arriving where we need to go. About the only thing we don't need light for is sleep, but as soon as we wake up, we need light again.

Not only does light show us the way and show us what we are doing, but light from the sun's rays is essential to our health. Just 15-20 minutes of exposure to sunlight in a day is enough to produce the Vitamin D your body needs to reduce blood pressure, relieve stress, improve the function of your immune system, and slow the growth of cancer cells. The Vitamin D that our body produces from sunlight releases serotonin which helps control your sleep pattern, your body temperature, and ward off depression. It also increases the amount of oxygen your blood can transport which boosts your energy levels and sharpens your mental faculties. It gives calcium for your bones. Sunlight even serves as a germ killer, that wounds heal faster when exposed to sunlight. Light brings healing to our bodies and produces good health. Keep yourself in darkness and even with Vitamin D supplements, it's not as good as just getting into the light. Without any light, we would die.

That's physical light and physical darkness, but the Bible often uses these terms spiritually. Darkness can be a metaphor for sin, such as it is used in John chapter 1. And we could talk about all that darkness of the world, all that bad stuff that is out there – everything from starving children, natural disasters (fires, earthquakes, hurricanes and the like), genocide, black lives matter, and #metoo. But instead of only talking about what is out there, what is in your life? Are there pockets of darkness in your life? Maybe some of them corresponding to the pockets of darkness in the world at large?

You may not see starving children in your house or on your block, but is your Christmas shrouded by the darkness of failure? Did you fail to get the gift you promised? Was there another promise you made to your kids, your friend, your spouse that you failed to keep? Did another year go by where you did not keep your New Year's resolutions? Is there a big project you didn't finish before the holidays? Did you fail?

Do you feel isolated from other people, shunned to a dark corner of life? Are you surrounded by people and yet feel so alone at the same time, that no one understands you because no one is going through what you go through and no one suffers as you suffer? Others are shouting that their lives matter, and you want to scream that your life matters, but who would listen? Who would care?

Does imperfection overshadow your accomplishments? The projects you completed weren't perfect. You tried hard, but you looked it over and now see all the imperfections. Do you look at the ideal held before you of what you should be and how you should act and yet that's not you? You know that you can't attain it, let alone maintain it. You may not have been a part of #metoo, but maybe someone has wronged you, violated you. You feel like damaged goods, that you will never be perfect not only because of what you do but also because of what has been done to you.

What do we do with those pockets of darkness in our lives? Do you try to ignore them, cover them up, hide them, hoping they go away? You and I can't escape the darkness. The only way for darkness to go away is for the light to come.

That is what we have come here tonight to celebrate. The light has come! “The light shines in the darkness.” (verse 5a) Who is this light? John makes a purposeful connection to Genesis chapter 1 when he starts his Gospel account with “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.” (verses 1-4) At the end of this section John clarifies even more: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” (verse 14a) The Word was with God, and the Word was God. This Word made everything, including that life-giving sun. This Word is life, and that life was the light of all mankind. He is the true light, who took on human flesh. This is Jesus – God from all eternity, uncreated, unborn, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit as evidenced in creation. He is the light that shines in the pockets of darkness in our lives.

Light brings healing, and light brings life. But light can hurt. You walk out of the office or out of the house when you had the shades down all morning, and even on a cloudy day your eyes squint because the light is so powerful. Can you imagine the light on that very first Christmas Eve where the shepherds were watching over their flocks at night? When the angel appeared to them, “the glory of the Lord shone around them.” (Luke 2:9) Their reaction to the heavenly light? They were terrified! The light was too much! The light hurt them, and not in a way that their eyes needed to adjust to the brightness. No, this light, this glory of the Lord, was pure. In the pure light of the Lord, their hearts were exposed, their pockets of darkness were revealed. In that moment, they realized how much of a failure they had been in life, how they had isolated themselves from others and, at times, from God, and how dreadfully imperfect they were. They were terrified! They could not stand in God’s light.

God’s light exposes us as well. We often try to dim his light so that we can stand it better. But when his light exposes the darkness, when we have to own our failures, our isolation, and our imperfections, it hurts. It hurts us that we can no longer hide from these things or hide them from God and others. It hurts to admit that we failed. It hurts that I feel alone even when surrounded by people. It hurts when I have to admit my imperfections, that I am not good enough - for others, for my spouse, my kids, my friends, and especially not for God.

As the light exposes us and dispels our pockets of darkness, it shows us what needs to be taken care of, what needs to be healed, and then heals it. We are shrouded in failure, but Jesus came and never once failed in his mission. He accomplished everything he set out to do. He took on human flesh to keep and obey God’s law for us, to suffer death for us, to die for us. He paid for our sins, our pockets of darkness. Mission accomplished. There is no failure with Jesus.

I feel alone and isolated, but Jesus took on human flesh to be the Immanuel, the God with us, the God who promises to never leave us or forsake us, the God who promises to be with us always to the very end of the age. Because he is God, he knows exactly what you are going through. He knows how alone you feel. He knows your hurt better than you do. He is the cure to our isolation. And what’s more is that “to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” (verses 12-13) By being the Light that has come into the world, by being the Immanuel (the God with us), Jesus gave us the right to become God’s children, part of his family forever. This is not something that we are born into, but something gifted to us by God. It’s not our effort that brings us to belong to God’s family, but the work of the Light, of Jesus, that shines in the darkness of our lives and our world and heals us. God has made you a part of his family so that you are never be alone again, no matter how alone you feel. God, the true light, is with us.

But am I good enough to be a part of God’s family? No, but that’s the point of him being the Light shining in our pockets of darkness. He did everything perfectly. He was and is the perfection that I am not. I am not good enough. He was and is good enough; he’s perfect. He perfectly fulfilled all of God’s law for us in our place. So, it’s never a question of whether or not I am good enough for God or good enough to belong to him and his family, to be a child of God. By what the Light, Jesus, has done, I am clothed with his perfection. I am perfect in his eyes right now. Because of what Jesus did for me, he gives me life eternal with him.

In all these ways, you have been exposed but also healed by the Light, by Jesus. So, after tonight, don’t go back to hiding your failures, your isolation, or your imperfections. You’ve been exposed, and Jesus, the true Light, has healed you. That’s what we celebrate tonight. That’s what we go and tell other people, just as the shepherds did. Jesus has come into our world to accomplish his mission, to be perfect because we are not, to be with us so that we are never alone. He is the light shining in the darkness, “and the darkness has not overcome it” nor will it ever. (verse 5) Let us shine his true light to everyone since he has come into the world to disperse our pockets of darkness. Shine the Light of our Immanuel to others so that they too can have the Light who succeeds where we fail, who gives us a belonging no matter how isolated we feel, who is perfect for us even while we are so imperfect. Amen.