

SEEING IS BELIEVING - LIGHT
A SERMON BASED ON JOHN 8:12-30
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO
SUNDAY, MARCH 15, 2020
10:00 a.m.

Well.

That was a week.

Pandemic. Cancellations. Travel advisories. Toilet paper.

Changed plans.

Scrambling to make alternate arrangements.

Low grade fear. Sometimes higher grade fear.

Panic shopping.

Wondering what kind of cough that was.

Was it a tickle? A cold? A pandemic cough?

One day you are planning a trip.

The next, you are being told not to leave your house.

It can get dark fast. Really fast.

And today, into the darkness Jesus says,

“I am the light of the world.

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

There was pushback the first time he said it.

It was the pushback you give the eternal optimist, or opportunist.

“You just don’t comprehend how serious this really is.”

It was the pushback you give the overconfident and under informed.

“Your ego and arrogance are so big you can’t see around them.”

The Pharisees were the religious authorities,

the humanities professors,

the ones in the know when it came to all things faith.

They pushed back at Jesus’ declaration

with challenges and questions.

You say you are the light of the world.

Whoever follows you will never walk in darkness

but will have the light of life?...

You can’t say that.

That is a self-made claim.

You need an outside authority to validate it.

You need a peer reviewed study.

Jesus responded, 'I testify for myself.

My other witness is the Father, who sent me.'

Jesus has made a bold declaration, then, a very bold claim,

First light of the world,

then, putting himself on par with God.

This Jesus is not the good guy, wise friend, helpful coach,

nice neighbour.

This Jesus thinks he's something.

The Father sent me. I stand with the Father.

It is such an outlandish thing to say,

that the Pharisees didn't even track with him.

That Jesus was equating himself with God the Father

was so over the top they didn't even reach for it.

They asked, 'Where is your Father?'

He replied, 'You don't know me or the Father.'

If you knew me, you would know the Father.'

They weren't getting it.

It's so bad, that you almost want the Monty Python troop to

do a sketch of this scene.

This parrot is dead.

No, no, he's resting.

Who is your father?

Why does he say, 'Where I go you cannot come?'

'Will he kill himself?'

Who are you?

John finally ends their pain, stops their questions and writes the obvious.

'They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father.'

It can get dark fast.

It's easy to be kept in the dark.

But Jesus says today,

"I am the light of the world.

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

It is all too easy to give pushback, especially on pandemic Sunday.

Light of the world Jesus?

I'm having trouble seeing it in a world that seems to have gone mad.

Never walk in darkness Jesus?

The world economy is sputtering toward stalling.

It might be tough to keep the lights on.

It would seem Jesus warrants the pushback that you give

the eternal optimist, or opportunist,

the pushback you give the one

who doesn't comprehend how serious the darkness really is.

It would seem Jesus warrants the pushback

you give the naive and the arrogant and ignorant.

Except Jesus is anything but naive.

In a later conversation with his disciples,

as he tries to explain to them what's coming for him, and them,

we see another Monty Python-esque scene of panicked questions.

What happens now?

What happens next?

What do you mean 'a little while?'

What does he mean?

Where are you going?

We don't know where you are going!

How can we know the way?

Show us the Father, then we'll be satisfied.

Jesus said to them in their confusion and in their panic.

'I have told you these things, so that in me, you may have peace.

In this world, you will have trouble.

But take heart.

I have overcome the world.'

It is not Jesus who is naive and arrogant and ignorant,

or the eternal optimist and opportunist.

It is us.

It is us, thinking that we can create a world that is perfectly safe.

It is we who are
naive and arrogant and ignorant
thinking that if we rubberize the playgrounds,
and have the last bottle of sanitizer,
and eat quinoa,
we will be safe.

It is we who are naive and opportunist and arrogant,
thinking that this life is solely and only in our hands,
thinking that the status of trouble free is in our grasp.

Jesus said, in this world you will have trouble.

The Bible is story after story of the brokenness of this world,
and the brokenness of people's souls.

In this world you will have trouble.

This is a world of Covid 19.

It is a world of SARS,
and HIV, and H1N1 and Spanish flu, black plague,
mental illness, pneumonia and cancer.

It is a world of tsunamis and volcanoes,

hurricanes and earthquakes.

It is a world of financial crisis, economic depressions and unemployment.

It is a world of the genocides and refugees.

It is a world of wars, colonialism, famines and poverty.

It is a world of greed,

and selfishness, and phobias and broken trust

and broken relationships.

It is a world that can get dark fast.

But Jesus said,

I am the light of the world.

I have overcome the world.

With water.

With a table.

With a cross.

With a tomb that stands empty

I have overcome the world.

I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness.

So follow me.

Follow my steps.

Love your neighbour as yourself.

Love your enemy.

If someone needs your cloak, give them your shirt as well.

Throw in a roll of toilet paper.

Forgive. Seventy times seven.

Feed the hungry. Mind the sick. Visit the prisoner.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness.

Whoever follows me will actually bring light to darkness.

The light of Jesus overcomes the world.

Father Richard Hendrick is a Franciscan priest.

My friend posted a poem he wrote.

Lockdown

Yes there is fear.

Yes there is isolation.

Yes there is panic buying.

Yes there is sickness.

Yes there is even death.

But,

They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise

You can hear the birds again.

They say that after just a few weeks of quiet

The sky is no longer thick with fumes

But blue and grey and clear.

They say that in the streets of Assisi

People are singing to each other

across the empty squares,

keeping their windows open

so that those who are alone

may hear the sounds of family around them.

They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland

Is offering free meals

and delivery to the housebound.

Today a young woman I know

is busy spreading fliers with her number

through the neighbourhood

So that the elders may have someone to call on.

Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples
are preparing to welcome
and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary

All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting
All over the world people are looking at their neighbours in a new way
All over the world people are waking up to a new reality
To how big we really are.
To how little control we really have.
To what really matters.
To Love.

So we pray and we remember that
Yes there is fear.
But there does not have to be hate.
Yes there is isolation.
But there does not have to be loneliness.
Yes there is panic buying.
But there does not have to be meanness.
Yes there is sickness.

But there does not have to be disease of the soul

Yes there is even death.

But there can always be a rebirth of love.

Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now.

Today, breathe.

Listen,

behind the factory noises of your panic

The birds are singing again

The sky is clearing,

Spring is coming,

And we are always encompassed by Love.

Open the windows of your soul

And though you may not be able

to touch across the empty square,

Sing.

It can be a world that is overcome.

Jesus said,

In this world you will have trouble.

But take heart.

I have overcome the world.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness"

Follow Jesus. Follow in his footsteps.

He is the light.

Bring the light when it gets dark.

Bring Jesus when it gets dark.

And see the world overcome.

Amen.