

Feb. 13, 2011

Isaiah 58:6-10; Luke 11:33-36

“Déjà Vu”

I must admit this feels a little strange. When I preached last month on January 2nd, my Scripture text was the beginning portion of the first chapter of John’s Gospel. The theme that I chose to use dealt with “light.”

When I began planning today’s service and sermon, I wanted to try to stay with Dr. Hink’s series in the Gospel of Luke. I chose Luke 11:33-36 because it comes in between Dr. Hink’s Scripture from last Sunday and what he will be using next Sunday.

Lo, and behold, Luke 11:33-36 deals with the theme of light. As Yogi Berra used to say, “It’s déjà vu all over again.” Although the theme is light, the emphasis is different. Last month, we discussed how Jesus was the light that had been promised in the Old Testament and was now fulfilled; and what it meant that Jesus was the light of the world.

Today, we will be talking about the light that is in us, and what Jesus expects us to do with that light. Listen now to the Word of the Lord as it is found in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 11, verses 33-36. (ESV)

³³ "No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. ³⁴ Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. ³⁵ Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. ³⁶ If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light."

Please pray with me. Guide us, O God, by your Word and Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find freedom, and in your will discover your peace; through Jesus Christ the light of the world. Amen.

WORSHIP SKETCH ON “LIGHT”

Light is a funny thing. There is a light on my clock radio that can barely be seen in the daytime, or when a lamp is on. But once all the lights in the room are off, that little clock radio's light shines like a beacon. The same is true for the tiny night lights I have scattered around the house.

At the beginning of our Boar's Head and Yule Log Festival, the lights here in the Sanctuary are darkened and there is a feeling of bleakness as our eyes try to adjust to not having light. Then we hear the tinkling of bells as the light sprite skips into the sanctuary, carrying a single lit candle in a lantern.

Amazingly, that one candle illumines her way to the Chancel steps, where the pastor waits to light his candle and then the candle symbolizing the light of Christ. Near the end of the Festival, the sanctuary lights are once again darkened, and shining brightly is the light from the Epiphany Star.

"Let there be light!" declared the Lord God at creation; and there was light. "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it" says John in his Gospel. The light that is Jesus Christ has come into our midst and is not to remain hidden but is to shine all around.

So what is the point of this little passage in Luke's Gospel? Elsewhere, Jesus tells His disciples that they/we are the light of the world, and our light, like the light of Jesus Himself, is meant to shine into a darkened world.

Then, in this passage, Jesus warns that we must take care lest the light that is inside us turns to darkness. What does He mean by that cryptic statement?

In Middle Eastern thought, "the eye, along with the heart, was understood to be the seat of human thought and emotion – in short, of one's entire personality." [Sharon H. Ringe]

So then, "if the 'eye,' which is the core of a person's intellect, feeling, judgment, will, and capacity for relationship, is healthy, that health permeates one's entire being the way the light of a lamp fills every corner of a room." [Ringe]

But if the eye or heart is not healthy, then the capacity for darkness, for evil, for sin, for separation from God, is huge. Jesus urges us to make sure that our inner lamp is always burning.

What can darken our inner light? William Barclay suggests three circumstances. The first one has to do with becoming accustomed to evil or to sin. Whenever we do something wrong, the first time often makes us nervous or frightened or even ill. But if we repeat that wrong over and over, soon we become accustomed to it and we feel nothing – we cease to care.

Second, we can become dulled to the pain and suffering around us and we simply accept it. Once we see or do evil and cease to care, we accept evil and do nothing to eradicate that evil. We do not bring the light of Christ into that darkness in our hearts or in the world. Our lamp ceases to burn.

This leads to the third circumstance: we become actively rebellious. We know the right way to live, but we stubbornly refuse to live that way. We become like the Prodigal son and his defiant older brother who knew how to behave as loving sons, but chose not to act that way. Instead, they both insulted and hurt their loving father.

The great danger of having a diseased eye is that our souls become darkened by evil and sin, and we no longer live lives of thankfulness and grace.

We cease to reflect the love of Jesus, and His light no longer shines forth from us. We end up being vessels that are useless to our Lord. This was Jesus' warning to those who first heard Him. He was the light of the world and many of His contemporaries turned from Him to embrace the darkness.

In his commentary on this passage, New Testament scholar N. T. Wright asks this: "Where does all this leave us today? The light of Christ has been in the world for 2,000 years. Are we any better at embracing it for ourselves than Jesus' contemporaries were? For that matter, are we shining this light to the world so that they can see [Him]?"

In our passage from Isaiah which Art read for us, God calls the people of Israel to be lights in their darkened world by caring for the poor, the hungry, the homeless, and by lifting the burdens of the oppressed. Are we doing this? Are we caring for one another, and for those outside these walls who are poor, hungry, homeless, abused, neglected, or oppressed? Are we shining our light, which comes from Jesus, into our world?

As our worship sketch put it: “As God first intended so long ago, at the beginning of time, when He spoke into the darkness and said those words that forever changed the destiny of man: ‘Let there be Light!’” Let your light shine.

Let us pray. Lord God, who said, “Let there be light” and there was light, help us to turn our eyes upon Jesus, the light of the world, and then to take that light into the world. May we have healthy eyes, so that we are full of the light of Jesus. Then, enable us to take our candles and light the world with Your love. We ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

The Rev. Pamela Maloney
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