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Scripture: John 8: 12-59

Sermon Title: Jesus is the Light of the World

John 8:12-59

Jesus the Light of the World

12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the

light of life.” 13 Then the Pharisees said to him, “You are testifying on

your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.” 14 Jesus answered,

“Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I

know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not

know where I come from or where I am going. 15 You judge by

human standards;^[a] I judge no one. 16 Yet even if I do judge, my

judgment is valid, for it is not I alone who judge but I and the

Father^[b] who sent me. 17 In your law it is written that the testimony

of two witnesses is valid. 18 I testify on my own behalf, and the

Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.” 19 Then they said to him,

“Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” 20 He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

21 Again he said to them, “I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.”

22 Then the Jews said, “Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’?” 23 He said to them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are from this world, I am not from this world. 24 I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.”[c] 25 They said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Why do I speak to you at all?[d] 26 I have much to say about you and much to condemn, but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.” 27 They did not understand

that he was speaking to them about the Father. 28 So Jesus said,
“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I
am he[e] and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things
as the Father instructed me. 29 And the one who sent me is with me;
he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.” 30
As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

31 Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you
continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will
know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” 33 They answered
him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves
to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?”

34 Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who
commits sin is a slave to sin. 35 The slave does not have a
permanent place in the household; the son has a place there
forever. 36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. 37 I

know that you are descendants of Abraham, yet you look for an opportunity to kill me because there is no place in you for my word.

38 I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father." [f]

39 They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, you would do[g] what Abraham did,

40 but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. 41 You are

indeed doing what your father does." They said to him, "We are not illegitimate children; we have one Father, God himself." 42 Jesus

said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God, and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent

me. 43 Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you

cannot accept my word. 44 You are from your father the devil, and

you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth

in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.[h] 46 Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? 47 Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God.”

48 The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” 49 Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. 50 Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. 51 Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.”

52 The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets, yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.’ 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?” 54 Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is

my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, ‘He is our God,’ 55 though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him, and I keep his word. 56 Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.” 57 Then the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?”[i] 58 Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.” 59 So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

(This is the Word of the Lord)

Prayer...

Introduction

Our Scripture reading this morning is full of many truths related to Jesus. I want to remind us that the conversation we are exploring today takes place right after Jesus offers grace and compassion to the woman caught in adultery. After Jesus tells her with kindness to

go and sin no more, Jesus is left alone with the pharisees. Now Jesus has just put them in their place and reminded them that the person who could throw the first stone at the woman would be the one without sin. The pharisees beginning with the eldest drop their stones and yet at the end of our passage today, they are quick to try and throw stones at Jesus.

Clearly the religious leaders are angry at Jesus for his words about himself. So what is Jesus saying that is so difficult for the religious leaders to handle.

Well first he shares what is the second I AM statement of the Gospel of John. Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

What a powerful word. Jesus is the light of the world. When I say that sentence, I want to pause and with gratitude say thank you God for bringing Jesus to earth as the light of the world. Friends, we all can get lost. Jesus is the light who brings us home to ourselves and to

what is true in life. Have you ever gotten lost at night? Imagine you are on a hike with some friends in the woods and it is getting dark, but everyone forgot a flashlight. Pretty soon you are struggling to see the path ahead. Now imagine up ahead you see a campfire. You no longer can easily see a path, but you follow the light and have a seat with your friends at the campfire. You recognize the person who has made the fire is Jesus and he is overjoyed that you have come to be with him. You sit next to him and smile and he smiles at you.

Or maybe imagine that you are on a boat, but due to the waves and darkness you cannot find the shore. Then the light from a lighthouse shines your way. As you are guided to the shore, who do you meet on the beach but Jesus.

You find freedom in encountering Jesus. He offers you himself and you are no longer walking in darkness. You are free indeed to follow the path of life.

Now the pharisees who are hearing Jesus speak are not happy with him. He has just freed a woman who was potentially going to be stoned. Clearly the religious leaders want to punish Jesus by trapping him in his words and then finding cause to harm him, even kill him.

They are mad that Jesus claims to be a messenger of his Father God. The pharisees think Jesus has a demon and might be a Samaritan, but Jesus says that he is from God the Father. Jesus says to those judging him, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”

As I was reflecting prayerfully on this passage, I found myself wanting to ponder more about the similarity between Jesus the Son and God the Father.

Here is what I am discovering for myself.

Unfortunately, I have a tendency to view God the Father a little bit different than God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. In my head I

know and preach that they are one and therefore the same, but in my heart I have been drawn more closely to Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

So why do I sometimes view God the Father not as positively as God the Son. I think it is because I have always related to Jesus as more friendly. As a kid I related to Jesus better or more positively, almost like an older brother or a young Dad who wants to hang out with me and play football in the backyard, kind of like my dad did. When I got to college, I imagined being one of the disciples who hung out with Jesus. I still feel like one of the disciples even though I am middle aged. God the Father has more easily been viewed by me as the part of the image of God that scared me in some of the Old Testament stories and that scared me in some of the New Testament passages that spoke about judgment. Just as a side note, there is a way to ready the Old Testament without being scared of God, but as a kid I

sometimes was scared by some of those stories, such as when the Egyptian soldiers died crossing the Red Sea.

Maybe, you are a little like me. Maybe thinking about God as father feels scary to you too, because that image brings up images of anger or punishment.

If that is the case for you, I have good news. Jesus here says he and the Father are basically one. If they knew him, they would know the father. Later in John 14: 9, he says it even more strongly to his disciples at the Last Supper, “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father.”

The theological implications for this truth are incredible. What if we never need to see God the Father or God the Son or God the Spirit as scary? What if God is love. Saint Ignatius of Loyola used to say it like this, “God is love loving.” I will say it again, “God is love loving.”

Therefore, any image you have been taught about God that is not loving is not the truth. God is not punitive. God is not violent. God is

not scary. Why? Because Jesus is the same as God the Father. And Jesus does not condemn, he heals. He brings light to the world.

So last weekend when I was teaching a group of students being trained to be spiritual directors, I was fortunate to stay with a couple of friends in Seattle. We had a lot of fun reflecting together on our faith. They showed me a beautiful cross. On the cross, was Jesus, but behind the cross also hanging there was an image of God the Father and the Holy Spirit as a dove. I had never seen a cross like this one. What it conveyed to me is that when Jesus hung on the cross out of love for the world, he was not really alone. God the Father and the Holy Spirit were with him also suffering because they are one. (Ask to show slide of cross)

Now Jesus might have felt alone on the cross, because he quoted Psalm 22 that says, “My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me”, but what if God the Father and Holy Spirit were with him also dying

on the cross. What if God was not separate from his son, but suffering with him because they are one.

I know some of you were taught something else. Many of us were taught that Jesus was put on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin and that God turned his back on his son and even poured God's wrath on the son who had become sin, but if that theology has bothered you, I have some good news. Many theologians and pastors like me do not teach God's wrath because it is inconsistent with a God of love. Instead pastors and theologians more like me teach that God is love and only love and did not punish his son. Rather God joined his son on the cross and has the same heart as his son. God is love. Jesus is the light of the world and in him there is no darkness. Father, Mother God also are only love and have no darkness. Holy Spirit is only love.

So why do some Christians teach something else? It is because they have interpreted the Bible differently and have learned a specific

theology through a particular Christian tradition. We actually have choices on how we interpret Scripture and how we image God.

I know having these theological conversations might be stretching at times. Maybe, you were mostly taught at some point that God the Father is at times wrathful because he hates evil and someone needed to pay for human sin because God is holy and just. If that theology brings you comfort, it is an option. I just want you to know that there are other theologies about God that I personally think are more loving and that do not create an awkward difference between what we experience of Jesus the Son of God and God the Father. Our text is clear today that Jesus and the Son are one. If you have seen the Son, you have seen the Father. If you have encountered the Son, you have encountered the Father.

I am frankly a bit embarrassed to share with you that I still struggle to see Father God as Loving. My focus on Mother God at this church is partly because it is easier to image God our Creator as a mother

than as a Father. What I am doing now in my faith is working on receiving in my heart the truth that God is all love. God our Mother and Father, our Creator, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all love. There is a Scripture that says there is no fear in love. Therefore we need not fear our God of love. Our God of love is not punitive or violent. Our God of love does however encourage healthy boundaries. God does forgive our sins and help us choose a better path. God is always gracious but that does not mean God is overly permissive. God wants us to be healthy, so God helps us receive and experience the path of life. Not all paths lead to life, but all paths that connect to our God of life do lead to life. Although suffering may be part of the journey, we know that resurrection is the final story.

I think our passage today gives us an invitation to see God the Father through the lens of Jesus. How wonderful to receive this invitation, so that we may walk in the grace of knowing our loving God, who is the Light of the World. When we walk with Jesus and see him as the

light we also are more equipped to love our world, to work for peace, to be in solidarity with Native Americans, immigrants, refugees, all ethnic groups, people of different faiths, those who are incarcerated, members of the LGBTQ plus community, human trafficking victims, people in poverty, and all those who are on the margins.

I was praying the other day and receiving a little song that connects to this passage well. It is about Jesus as the light of the world. It goes like this...

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, you are the light of the world

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, you are the light of the world

In you, we find grace.

In you, we find hope.

In you, we find peace and love. (REPEAT)

Let us pray...