

Sermon

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February 18, 2018: Lent 1

John 7:1-10, 8:12-20: I am the Light of the World

“A Living Metaphor: Light”

Let’s join our hearts in prayer: May the words spoken and the words received be only in your service, great God of Love.

Before the beginning, was the One who created all that has been, is, and will be to come. We call that One “God,” the I AM, whom we know as Love. In our Christian tradition, we know Love’s yearning to be known to us face-to-face through the person of Jesus.

Humanity cannot comprehend the All of Jesus, the Christ, the One of Love, and so we search for images to help us understand. The author of the Gospel of John—whom I’ll just refer to as John for ease—is a poet. He uses metaphor as a vehicle to communicate who Jesus is. Lent is a season of introspection as we prepare for the coming days of crucifixion and resurrection. During Lent this year we will focus on John’s metaphors for Jesus, to come to know various aspects of the I Am. Then, as ones created in the image of God, we will consider how we ourselves are created to be living metaphors for God, the Living Love.

On Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, we heard Jesus say I AM the Bread of Life. I AM Love, your very sustenance.

This morning we hear Jesus say, “I AM the Light of the World.”

I AM is the illumination of God. Through Jesus, Love that was and is and is yet to come can be seen. Love’s contours and colors are made visible. Through Jesus, Love chooses not to be hidden or unknown, but in our presence and discernable. Through Jesus, Love is revealed in plain sight. By his feeding and healing, his beckoning and receiving, by his challenging and protesting, he testifies in the full light of day to a God of Living Love.

We, too, are created to be living metaphors for the Light of the World, to make known the contours and colors of Love. We can be those through whom God’s love is discernable and tangible. We can be God’s Love in plain sight to those longing to glimpse it.

The illumination of Love in the person of Jesus shines in particular, contextual ways. When we experience a lack of love, Jesus is the Light of compassion and care. Like the sun or the focus of a heat lamp, Jesus bears rays of warmth to those shivering in rejection or pain. Our scripture stories tell of the ways he is balm those who are hurting in body and spirit, and an embrace those who experience rejection.

We, too, are created to be living metaphors of the Light of the World, shining the warmth of compassion. By our care for those in need of healing, and our embrace of those who have been cast to the margins, we become God’s Living Love.

When we have wandered away from the I AM, Jesus is like the porchlight of the old Motel 6 commercials, “We’ll keep the light on for you.” This is the patient and persistent Love that beckons us home, always ready to welcome us, no matter when we arrive. This is the love Jesus tells about in the parable of the son who squanders his father’s inheritance and crawls back to his father begging for forgiveness. Rather than finding the porch light off and the door locked, the son finds the light on and the door wide open, with his parent waiting up for him and eager to enfold the regretful child in a tight embrace.

We, too, are created to be living metaphors for the Light of the World, keeping the light

of Love on for those who have wandered away from God. We become I AM's love when we serve as an inviting light, welcoming God's beloveds home without shaming or retribution but with open arms and open hearts.

When we find ourselves in dangerous waters, Jesus is the lighthouse of Love. He signals shoals and shallows so we can find a safe harbor. Danger comes in many forms. We can place ourselves in danger by engaging in activities that are contrary to life and health. We can be placed in danger by addiction or mental illness or other internal factors. Or, we—in fact, the whole of creation—can be placed in danger by the actions of others, such as abuse, oppression, and other kinds of violence. The I AM is the Light of repentance, recovery, hope, or resistance—whatever the appropriate and necessary response to the danger—for the Light of Love always desires our wholeness.

We, too, are created to be living metaphors for the Light of the World, beacons that illumine a path to safety for those who are endangered by themselves or others. This way of being God's light in the world can be tricky, though, especially when it is someone other than ourselves who is in the rough waters. We must be careful to measure our responses by seeking what is life-giving and invites wholeness for the other, apart from our own agenda. To be a Living Light, we must shine where others need to see a safe path, not where it might be more convenient or self-serving for us to shine.

When we refuse to live in Love, Jesus is the light that exposes the shadows of our sin. In the light of Love, greed, injustice, abuse, callousness, disregard, exploitation, and withholding are revealed and judged. The Light of the World is not that of a spotlight to lay bare sin merely for the sake of exposure. Jesus doesn't call out sin for the purpose of humiliation. Rather, the I AM is Love that reveals sin in order to point the way to righteousness, that all are liberated to live in shalom with the One who created and all of God's beloveds.

We, too, are created to be living metaphors for the Light of the World, who like Jesus and the prophets of old, can speak the truth of Love to greed, injustice, abuse, callousness, disregard, exploitation, and withholding. Our own prophetic words are not meant simply to "call out" what (and especially who) is wrong, but rather to offer a vision of another way, the way of righteousness and shalom. To remain silent is to participate in the sin. To point fingers at others without recognizing our own participation in sin is hubris. But to be a living metaphor of the Light is to name sin that is destructive to Beloved Community, and point to and participate in the realm of God about which Jesus taught.

Our scriptures tell the story of light this way: "God said, 'Let there be light.' And so light appeared. God saw how good the light was."<sup>1</sup> God spoke Light into existence. Christ is the divine Light spoken into human existence in the person of Jesus. We, created in God's own image and by God's grace, can be living metaphors of that Light in our own body, mind, and spirit, and in our own time and place. We, like Jesus, are created to be the Light of Love's compassion, welcome, guidance, and righteousness.

This week of Lent, notice the Light of God's Love. Where do you see it, in small or larger ways?

This week of Lent, notice where you can be a living metaphor of God's Love and Light. There is an abundance of opportunities to shine the I AM's light into our world. Responding to this week's news of another tragic school shooting. Supporting the opening of the Black Panther movie that celebrates the strength and dignity of persons of African descent. Reaching out to your lonely or hurting neighbor, who might even be sitting next to you in the pew.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:3-4a, *Common English Bible*

When is being the Light easy? When is it more difficult? How does God get your attention when God desires to shine through you? How do you say thank you to the One who created you in love and creates love in you to share with all of creation?

Receive the Light. Be the Light. For the sake of shalom. Amen.