

Title: "Jesus: The Light of the World"

Text: John 7:1-15; 7:37-44, 8:12

Turn with me again today to the Gospel of John chapter 7.

-Earlier in the service we read the beginning of chapter 7 as Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles.

-His brothers urged him to go and make a name for himself in Jerusalem.

-Initially Jesus was reluctant to go, and didn't want to make a splash in Jerusalem,

-but then later Jesus decides he will go.

-Now the Feast of Tabernacles was a week-long celebration in Jerusalem.

-So Jesus arrives at some point during the week,

-and it's not long before everyone in town knows of his arrival and is talking about him.

I'd like you to turn to chapter 7, verses 37-44, where we come in on Jesus on the very last day of the Feast.

-It's on this last day that he really is going to make a splash among the people of Jerusalem.

-Listen as I read John 7:37-44, and then I am going to flip ahead to chapter 8, verse 12.

"I am the Light of the World," Jesus said, "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

During this season of Lent, we are inviting Jesus to be the one to "re-introduce himself to us."

-And in the Gospel of John, Jesus does that very thing in a memorable way by proclaiming seven rather stunning

attributes of who He is,

-each of which begin with the words "I Am."

"I am the Light of the World, I am the Gate for the sheep, I am the Good Shepherd, I am the True Vine, I am the Bread of Life, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

-On each of the 6 Sunday's of Lent, we will look a different one of these ending on Easter with the seventh one,

"I am the Resurrection."

So today Jesus introduces himself by saying, "I am the Light of the world."

Now that is quite a statement to make for oneself all-by-itself.
-But the context in which Jesus makes the statement is also pretty astounding.

John tells us at great length that Jesus made this statement on the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem.

-And he tells us that this wasn't the only astounding thing Jesus said that day.

-He also told the people at the feast back in verse 37-38 that if anyone of them was thirsty they should come to him and drink.

-For he said, "Whoever believes in me, streams of living water will flow from within him."

Now the reason these two statements at the Feast of Tabernacles were so astounding is that

-the Feast of Tabernacles was a celebration of the Exodus from Egypt.

-In particular, it was a remembrance of the 40 years in the Wilderness as the Israelites made their way to the Promised Land of Canaan.

It was during those 40 years of wandering in the wilderness that they lived in tents.

-And even God lived among them in a tent.

-It was called "the tabernacle."

And so during the Feast of Tabernacles, everybody came to Jerusalem and camped out all around the city.

-People brought tents, or set up little lean-to's called "booths" and everybody lived in temporary moveable shelters for the week.

And as they gathered for worship and celebration, they would remember the wilderness wanderings and all that God did for them during those 40 years.

Now two of the big things God did for them in the wilderness,

- was He supplied water from a rock for them when they were desperately thirsty.
- and He guided them with a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire to be their light by night.

So guess what? When later generations of Jews celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles every year,

- the celebration included two symbolic acts every day.
- In the morning each day, priests would take water from the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem,
 - and pour the water into a large golden basin in the Temple courts.
- They would do this with all the people watching in remembrance of how God supplied them streams of water in the wilderness.

- And every evening they would light giant Menorah's,
 - huge candelabras that stood in the Temple courts.
- These candles would light up the whole outer court yard where all the people gathered.
 - They lit them every evening in remembrance of how God appeared among them each night in the wilderness as a fire of radiant light.

So imagine now Jesus, on the very last day of the feast,

- standing in the Temple courts, and probably just after they have poured the water into the big, gold basin,
- saying, "If anyone is thirsty [like our ancestors were thirsty in the wilderness], let them come to me and drink!
- Whoever follows me will find streams of living water will flow up from within him."

And then later in the evening just as they were lighting the candles on the various menorah's in the court of the women and gentiles,

- Jesus saying, "I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

Wow, do you see how the setting adds a whole new dimension to these statements Jesus proclaims?

Some people who heard him said, "Surely this man is a prophet!"

-Others said, "He is the Christ, the Messiah."

-Still others said, "How can the Christ be a guy from Galilee? That's not where the Christ is supposed to come from?"

And among the Jewish leaders there was even greater antagonism.

-They asked, "Who does this guy think he is?!"

"It was Moses who struck the rock and water came out.

-Does he think he is the new Moses?

And it was God Himself who was the Light for His people in the wilderness.

-Does the Jesus think he is God himself?

-How can he be the light of life?"

You see, they got the symbolism!

-They knew immediately that Jesus was introducing himself to all the people at the Temple, as the One to whom all of the Old Testament events pointed.

They saw that he was proclaiming himself to be the new Moses who would lead God's people to a land of promise.

And He was! He was saying that those who followed him would find streams of water all along the journey!

-And not only that, the water would not be coming from a rock, but welling up from within because of the gift of the Holy Spirit He would give them.

"I AM that living water," Jesus was telling them!

And then He was proclaiming that those who would follow him would find His presence in their lives to be a light for their journey,

- just as God led his people with a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night at the time of the Exodus.

-Jesus said, "I am that light for God's people now.

-I am, I am, I am.

My friends, do you know that Jesus still is speaking those words for us today?

Think for a moment about what it means that Jesus is the Light of the World for us.

-In the Bible, light and darkness are potent metaphors for good and evil.

Darkness is a metaphor for sin, for “the world, the flesh, and the devil.

-It is a metaphor for falsehood, for hidden-ness, for death.

And in contrast, light is a metaphor for truth, purity, and holiness.

-It is a metaphor for beauty, open-ness, transparency, and authenticity.

And we get that, right?

-We know that light reveals truth.

-When we turn on a light at night, it allows us to see clearly,

-It exposes objects that have been hidden in the darkness.

-It helps us to identify that thing we tripped over in the dark.

And we know that darkness can feel evil, and oppressive, and scary.

-It can cause us to feel lost and lonely, blind and directionless.

So you would think we would all be delighted to have Jesus be the light of our world.

-But the truth is, sometimes we are afraid of His light because we are afraid of exposure.

-We are afraid his light will expose the darkness in us.

-Like little kids we are afraid of getting found out or caught.

But Jesus says, “I am the light of the world. Just follow me and you will not walk in darkness anymore, but have the light of life.”

-And you see, it’s an invitation to life that He’s giving us.

-Not to a spanking. He wants his light to cast out our darkness and to set us free from it.

He invites us to receive His light like we receive the warmth of the sun.

-Without the sun, our planet would be cold and dark and barren and lifeless.
But because of the sun, our planet is beautiful, and colorful, and full of abundant life.

Jesus' light is more like that.

-Or it's like the headlights on your car.

-When you are driving in the dark of night, it is such a blessing to be able to turn on the headlights to see where you are going.

-What a relief to have light on a darkened roadway.

You see, Jesus' light is meant to be a huge blessing to us,

-It's meant to bring us great relief.

-Because His light brings sight, and color, it brings clarity and understanding.

-His light helps us see obstacles in our way, that we would run into if we were left in the dark.

All the way back at the beginning of creation in Genesis 1,

-it says the universe was formless and void, dark and cold and lifeless.

And you know the first thing God said was, "Let there be light," and that began the whole process of creation.

And later, in the face of a world broken and filled again with darkness, it says that God so loved the world, he sent his only begotten Son into the world "as light into darkness."

-God did not send him into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

In the Book of Revelation, when this same Apostle John is given a glimpse of heaven,

-he sees the throne of God, and the One sitting on the throne is bathed in unapproachable light.

-And the radiance of that light is refracted out through heaven in all the colors of the rainbow.

You see, God's light is beautiful, glorious, majestic, and awesome. It is lifegiving to all creation.

So when we are stuck in darkness behind walls that we have erected to protect ourselves from exposure,
-Jesus, "I am the light of the world. Follow me, and let God's light come in."

When we are feeling cut off from God and others and even from ourselves,
-Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Follow me and let God's light come in."

His proclamation is an invitation to let the light and life of God, come into your darkness and be made manifest to you.

Don't be afraid of his light.
-It will bring you life,
-it will bring you warmth,
-it will bring you truth and beauty and wholeness and healing.

It will expose you, that is true,
-because God's light will reveal your situation and condition as you are hiding out there in the darkness.
-But God's light will not condemn you if you welcome it.
-The light is there to heal you.

Jesus is that Light, and he shines for us to bring us life.
-And that life is a life in relationship with God and with others.
-It's a life that is full of grace and truth,
-a life of fellowship, and warmth, beauty and joy.