

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Got a Light?"  
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(Third Sunday After Epiphany)

When we were in Saskatchewan in the late eighties, there was a crisis of people leaving the province. They had made a big celebration of reaching one million inhabitants in the 70s, but then in the late '80s the numbers were down 25% or more, and one day the main paper in Saskatoon stated the statistics and said, "Would the last one to leave the province, please turn out the lights." I suppose Newfoundland and Labrador has had these moments as well.

What strikes me is the common phrase to "remember to turn off the lights." Except if you are in Quebec, where it is acceptable English to say "close the lights." Much is made of the light, more than how much it costs you on your electric bill or how much it costs the environment in lost energy.

The light was the first thing God spoke about in Scripture. He said, "Let there be light." This also happens to be the motto of the University of California, *Fiat Lux*. Much of the universe is invisible dark matter and dark energy, which scientists are beginning to explore but because it is essentially invisible, it makes it difficult to apply the same criteria as those which are used to discover the visible. Light is presupposed for our existence, for life as we know it.

Limited light in daily living brings difficulties, such as Vitamin D deficiency, and Seasonal Affective Disease. We know this here, or know of someone who has been taken by surprise by one of these conditions. Perhaps there are others that you can tell me about.

The light is crucial to life. This is as true of spiritual life as it is of natural life. This is why the prophets including Isaiah speak of such a light in the Messiah to come. The light comes to a people in darkness. That darkness is more than ignorance and fear. That darkness is a spiritual oppression that keeps people locked in addictive behaviours and self-destructive and malevolent causes. There is a darkness which comes over nations and individuals and even the whole of humanity. Such darkness is sin and rebellion to God and God's ways. There are individual and institutional and corporate and national sins, no doubt. But you and I are called to forsake

our own sins and follow the Lord. But we find it, I find it difficult if not impossible to change. Then the Lord intervenes.

And the promise is lifted up before the people, as to a people who have seen nothing but fear, oppression and violence that a new era is coming, that a new relationship with God is being created.

David sings of such a relationship, "The Lord is my light and my salvation." Now we know David needed protection against his own people, against his own king, as well as against his own tendency to sin. So do we. David is a person who received the invitation of the Lord to know and love Him. We too receive this invitation again today. Let us not throw such an invitation back into His face, but warm to God's creative attempts to draw us close to Him. Do you ever wonder how God feels in the face of so much rejection?

Paul warns about the darkness of divisiveness in his letter to the Corinthians. This is appropriate in light this being the last day of the week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which apparently doesn't happen at this time of year in St. John's, due to weather conditions. So it was agreed to move the week until sometime after Easter. There is agreement and unity here about the weather. Back to the Corinthians. There was much to thank the Lord in regard to the Corinthian church, but it was nevertheless full of problems, sins and challenges. They were such a gifted church, but their gifts were pulling them apart rather than building up the church. So he had to speak about love. (in chapter 13) They were impressed with individual leaders, but not as concerned about the state of people coming into relationship with Jesus, so he had to remind them that Jesus was to be the centre of the church, not Paul or Peter or Apollos or any other current or past leader. They were impressed with the education and the speaking abilities of certain of the leaders. Although Paul too was well educated, he had to remind those impressed with education that there is a foolishness that is always attached to the gospel. And what people consider stupid about God may be the highest wisdom of all. This has its culmination in the cross. More about this in the coming weeks as we grow closer to Good Friday.

And then we see Jesus starting his ministry in Galilee amongst both Jews and Gentiles, to once again say in this Epiphany season, that the Good News about Jesus is for everyone. He is the Light of the World. And Matthew records his first sermon. And it is much shorter than mine today. Some of you will be saying, "I told you so." Don't get too smug though because the

Sermon on the Mount is coming as well. Here is Jesus' first sermon: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Change your mind about God because God is moving into the neighborhood.

We need to change our minds about God when we think we know better than God. We need to change our minds about God when we think what God has to say is irrelevant or unworthy of our time or effort. We need to change our minds about God so that we can see Jesus looking into our eyes and saying "Follow me."

They did a risky thing in following Jesus. And it is still risky today, here. They left the comfort of what was familiar, even family and work to be with Jesus. We often have to choose what we will do in a day and age that increasingly dislikes Christianity. Our choice to follow Christ always comes with a cost. That cost will be different for every person. I cannot tell you how much it will cost you, nor could I have told the first disciples how much it would cost them. But be sure of this: Beware of costless religion.

Jesus went with his new found friends, and he began teaching, preaching and healing wherever he went. Have you ever asked yourself what the difference is between teaching and preaching? Teaching imparts knowledge. Preaching also imparts knowledge but it also challenges the listener to respond with a life change, with an attitude change, with a significant change of some kind. Preaching should stir to action. And Jesus didn't just talk, he offered healing to those who ask. And the church still is the place to ask for healing prayer.

I'm suggesting that you once again turn to the Light. I entitled the sermon, "Got a light?" because of those dozens of individuals who have asked me over the years for a match or a lighter. I've never been quick enough or courageous enough to say I have a light, but no lighter or match. Do you have the Light lightening your darkness, showing your path through the shadows of life? Who do you turn to in the darkest times?

One of the worst things about migraines is the light sensitivity. It's almost as if the light burns itself into your head, as the pain of the migraine burns behind one eyeball or the other. This sends sufferers such as myself into the shadows, hoping for relief. But God knows us in the shadows and in the dark. He simply looks for us to embrace the light of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.