

**McCabe United Methodist Church**

**December 24, 2009**

**John 8:12**

“A Little Light”

Pastor Gary Walters

The end of December is a season of contrasts. We just experienced the shortest, darkest day of the year. The sun setting at 4:30 in the afternoon and rising at 8 whatever. All this dark is a little bit oppressive, but inserted into the middle of this darkness there is Advent and Christmas, with its deliberate effort at adding some light back into these dark days. We decorate our houses with lights, we put up trees in our homes with lights on them. Candles are prominent and tinsel sparkles. In the scripture passages this evening, we are reminded of another light inserted into this season. Jesus came proclaiming “I am the light of the world.” And of course he was just laying hold to the images, the promises that the prophets had given as to who Christ would be. It begs the question, what does Christ mean exactly by that phrase, “I am the light of the world.”? Maybe even a more basic question than that, is what, is light?

I don't know if the physical definition is all that helpful. Physics tells us that light is the electromagnetic radiation that has a wave length in the range of 4000 to 7700 angstroms. That is what we can perceive with the unaided eye. But, I have a feeling that is not what Jesus meant, but maybe it is. But, if it is what he meant, I am sure that he meant much more by it also. Like a light turned on in a dark room, invading the darkness and driving it out, Jesus came and drove the spiritual darkness from our world. We have come to this night to relive the story and the meaning of that first Christmas night. The story of light appearing in the midst of darkness, of a star piercing a black winter's night, leading Wisemen from afar, of angels breaking the silence of a frozen countryside, of God's light dawning on the darkness of human history. Jesus meant many things when he said “I am the light of the world.”

We shouldn't be surprised by that. Think of the number of things that we mean when we say light. It can mean brightness or illumination (like flipping on the light when we walk into the room). We can refer to light as a pathway or route (as in-despite the darkness of despair, hope sustained us and faith guided us along the way). Light could be a traffic signal or warning light. Spiritual awareness as in “he/she has seen the light” or clarification, as in “let me shed some light on the subject.” Then, there is to set on fire or to ignite, to kindle, to cause something to give off light, like a candle or better yet, the warm glow of a fireplace. Well, Jesus is and does all of this and more. He guides and leads us, he lightens and helps us, he gives sight and hope. Jesus is indeed the light of the world.

I would like to look at a few of those in a little more detail. First of all, think of light as that guiding light or that point that gives us a reference. If you have to get up in the middle of the night and the nightlight is out or all the other lights are off in the house, you stumble and grope through the darkness. But if there is a night light, even if it just the glow of an alarm clock, it's extremely helpful. But think of trying to maneuver through your house on those rare occasions when the power is completely out.

I remember my first experience of trying to navigate when it was completely dark. I was at Boy Scout camp and I had never been in the woods at night before, at least not that far out in the woods. I grew up in Rapid City and I had been out in the hills at night, but always on the perimeter of town. Even though it was dark out in the woods, the light from the cities gave enough of a glow that you could navigate and after your eyes adjusted you could maneuver fairly well.

However, the Boy Scout camp in the Black Hills is across from Crazy Horse Monument and it is way the heck out there with no towns near by. We were trying to find our way. We did a night hike up to the top of Medicine Mountain and our instructions were to turn off our flashlights, put them away, and don't use any light for the return trip. I tell you what, that was a long journey down. It was so dark that at times you couldn't even see your hand in front of your face, but one of the few ways we navigated, after our eyes adjusted, we began to calm down, and we were just a little more patient. Then we realized even the glow of the stars above were pretty helpful. Given that reference point the stars guided us. Even the silhouette of the stars on the horizon helped give us a feel for the land and where we were, even though we still had a hard time seeing what was immediately in front of us, on that moonless night, the stars were enough. I think Christ is something of that North Star for us, that fixed point that does not change. That as we set our eyes on that light we are guided.

This is a little bit different way of taking light, but I think it is appropriate when we think of who Jesus Christ is and what he came to do; because light can also mean lite ,to be an easy burden, or to lighten one's load. Jesus, Mary's boy, can carry more than his fair share and he carries that load for us. You know Jesus started out this earth as the son of a carpenter and as such learned the trade that his earthly father carried on. I can imagine the sign at their shop in "Nazareth, Joseph and Sons." The caption underneath saying our yokes fit well. As a carpenter it stands to reason that making yokes was a common task of theirs. Nazareth is on the rim of one of the most fertile farming areas in the entire Near East, the Jezreel Valley, so it would have been a common task. Later, when Jesus was an adult and grown up and had left his father's carpenter shop, as he was talking to the crowds, he said "my load is easy and my burden is light" because Mary's boy can carry more than his share and he will lighten the load for us.

Then, certainly the light of hope, Christ comes to give us something greater than ourselves to live for. Christ comes to kindle in our eyes the light of courage, of love, of hope. We have all heard that it is said that he or she is the light of my life. We know what that person means, the person is in love. They have found someone who fills their heart and mind. There is a reason we describe that experience of young love, or first love, as falling in love. It's sudden and it's intense. There is a certain glow about the person, a lightness of step, a flush and passion of fire upon their face. Many of us have lived that experience and feel it even now. Christ came to fill our hearts and minds like that. To fill us with a hope and a love that comes from the light of someone's love poured out upon us. We take that love as a gift and it fills us up. And as much as an earthly partner might fill our mind and our emotions, Christ is the lover of our souls. Who loved us enough to die on a cross, who loved us enough to go from the throne on heaven to a feeding trough in a barn. While we are amazed at the love that another human can have for us and how it fills us up, how much more that love of Christ should fill us and inspire us. He is the one who said, "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." That is, whoever's heart and mind are filled with my love, whoever understands the depth of my love, whoever yields to my tender call, will never walk in darkness. Whether it's that sense of guiding light or to lighten our load in the toil through life or to fill us with that love of another, the invitation of Christmas is come. Come to the light, that light of Jesus Christ, and let him fill your life with his light and his love and his hope. We just sang, in the dark street shineth, the everlasting light, the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight. Lighten the darkness, the son of God in a broken world. Jesus comes to us once again. We have come here tonight to celebrate the birth of Christ, the light of the world and we have come to proclaim, and claim as our own, that light of Christ. To hear, to feel, to understand the fulfillment of God's word and promise in Jesus Christ, wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace. Indeed, the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.