

Small Group notes to accompany the Sermon based on

I am..... the light of the World.

John 9 v5

Sunday 29th November 2009

Welcome

Icebreaker - In what ways do people use the lighting of candles in our society as a symbolic act?

Worship

Sing or listen to – ‘*Light of the world*’ by Tim Hughes having lit a candle prominently located in the room. Follow this with a moment of silence.

Word

Read Text – John 9 v1-12

The following needs adapting by group leaders and provides the full text of notes used for the basis of the sermon. It may provide enough material for three separate sessions.

I am... the light of the world

Introduction

Part of our series based around the series of sayings through which John draws attention to Jesus progressive revelation as to his true identity.

So far we have considered:

- I am the Bread of Life John 6 v25-40
- I am the Vine John 15 v1-8
- I am the Resurrection and the Life John 11 v17-27
- I am the Gate John 10 v1-10
- I am the Good Shepherd John 10 v11-21

We have not always considered these in the order they appear in John’s gospel but rather relate them to a relevant theme of the Sunday or season that we are in.

Today being Advent Sunday we are considering together Jesus claim to be the Light of the world

While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

John 9v5

Advent can be described as a Season of Light

The season of Advent is often associated with Light. The resplendent candlelit Service of nine lessons and Carols at Kings College Cambridge is one of the most famous examples in our own culture of a ‘Service of Light.’

The climax of that service is based on John 1 v1-14 where John first introduces the link between the coming of Jesus whom he calls ‘The Word’ with light.

In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness

but the darkness has not understood it

John 1 v3-4

Jesus being the Light of the World is one of the three recurring themes we notice given prominence in John’s Gospel those of life, light and love.

1) In this Advent we are reminded firstly that this season of light brings Joy.

In John 1 the coming of Jesus is contrasted to the bringing of light into the darkness that existed before creation.

As Tom Wright states

*The Word challenged the darkness before creation
and now challenges the darkness
that is found tragically within in creation.*

Advent marks then a significant sense of preparation for the coming of the light into the world. In creation God said 'Let there be light' and it was so, the writer of Genesis also records that this light was good.

*'God saw that the light was good
and he separated the light from the darkness'*

Genesis 1v4

Advent, which literally means 'coming', provides us with an opportunity to properly prepare for the coming of the light of the world into our darkness. As we light the four candles around the central candle in our Advent Wreath we are looking forward to lighting what has become known as the Paschal candle at the earliest opportunity on Christmas Morning in our Midnight Communion Service commencing on Christmas Eve. (11.00 St John's & 11.30 Bredfield)

The tradition of lighting candles in the life of the people of God stretches back to the tradition of lighting candles and speaking a blessing over them at dusk on a Friday night which marks the beginning of the Sabbath. This echoes the ceremonial lighting of the lamps in the tabernacle and later in the temple both morning and evening. (Exodus 30 v7-8). The light is the seven branch candlestick that was fuelled by oil and never meant to go out. It is symbolic of the presence of God and never meant to be extinguished and is mentioned in the call of Samuel when he was a boy.

*The lamp of God had not yet gone out and Samuel was lying down in the temple where the ark of God was.
I Samuel 3 v3*

John links Jesus being the light of the world with Spiritual illumination and not only introduces this concept in the prologue but also reintroduces this theme quite starkly in Chapter 8.

*When Jesus spoke again to the people he said
I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life.*

John 8v12

In today's passage we have the repeated phrase claim by Jesus to be the light of the world

*While I am in the world, **I am the light of the world***

John 9v5

This is a light that will go beyond the confines of the people of Israel.

John is seeking to portray Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, the Messiah. (John 20 v31)

Part of the hope of the Servant of the Lord who was to come was that he would bring fulfilment to make his people a light to the nations.

*I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness
I will take hold of your hand
I will keep you
and will make you to be a covenant for the people
and a light for the Gentiles
to open the eyes that are blind
to free captives from prison
and to release from the dungeon*

those who sit in darkness

Is 42 v6-7

The release of the man born blind from birth into sight is something that is meant to **bring joy**, to be rejoiced over. As with other miracles recorded by John he draws out far more spiritual teaching than the other gospel writers do as the later interaction with the Pharisees, the man's parents and the man himself demonstrate. (v13-41) The giving of sight to the blind was predicted as a Messianic activity in what we have as the Old Testament. This coming of light into the darkness is intimately connected to the **offer of life to all**.

In him was life and that life was the light of men.

John 1v4

The emphasis in John 8 is that Jesus is the light of the world

*Whoever follows him will never have to walk in darkness again
but have the light of life*

John 8v12

In what ways can you rejoice over areas of your life where Jesus has brought light into your darkness and in doing so brought life?

2) This season of light also brings Judgement

The problem is we prefer darkness to light.

*The light shines in the darkness
but the darkness has not understood it*

John 1 v3-4

This is explained in more detail in Jesus response to Nicodemus

*This is the verdict:
Light has come into the world,
but men loved darkness instead of light
because their deeds were evil.
Everyone who does evil hates the light
and will not come into the light
for fear that his deeds will be exposed.
But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light
so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done
has been done through God.*

John 3 v19-21

The theme of God's light coming into to the world is rooted in the Old Testament with the hope that Israel will be that light. Yet Jesus in John 8 v12 says that **he is the light of the world**. As Tom Wright comments whilst the bringing of judgement is not Jesus first priority as that is to bring life, inevitably the rejection of Jesus and his message offering salvation, love, and life means that **some are condemned**.

*These are those so steeped in evil
that the coming of the light is not good news, but bad news.*

The healing of this blind man in John 9 is one that should be welcomed and rejoiced over. Instead there are those who cannot rejoice because they can't accept Jesus for who he is.

The Pharisees seem to have their minds already made up...

This is man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.

Even his parents seem unable to fully express their joy in Jesus as the Christ.

*But how can he see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age;
he will speak for himself.*

John 9v21

This lack of joy is a disappointment.

As Tom Wright comments

*Where we would like to see faith, acceptance and hope,
we see just the opposite*

p139

Both the Pharisees and the Parents appear to be acting out of fear.

- For the Pharisees it is the fear of changing their cherished world view signified by the coming of Jesus. Already they have dismissed him as being the Messiah as he has already broken the 'law' of the Sabbath by healing a man on the Sabbath and now they find he has done the same with the man born blind.
- The parents are scared of being put out of the synagogue (John 9 v22) which means more than just not being able to go to Church but means being ostracised from the community.

Both in different ways act out of fear. Perhaps the strongest judgement comes on the Pharisees because they are the very people you would have thought would have welcomed a move of God encapsulated in the person of Jesus.

Jesus says in his concluding remarks to them

For judgement I have come into this world

*so that the blind will see
and those who see will become blind*

John 9v39

In other words Jesus coming has the effect of dividing people between those who receive him (John 1 v12) and believe that he is the Christ(21 v31) and those who do not recognise him nor receive him. (John 1v10-11)

Application

Jesus coming emphasises and exposes the difference between doing good and evil and this is a particular challenge to our own age when everything is relative. There are less and less clear divisions between what is right or wrong and a concern not to emphasise moral absolutes.

We need to allow the light of the world to shine his light into our darkness before we start pointing the finger at others.

- Perhaps our *rejection* of Jesus and his new ways of doing things is based on the *fear of the unknown*.
- Perhaps we feel *resentful* of God's dealings with us that may seem unfair.
- Perhaps our *anger* is such that we find it difficult to rejoice with those whom God is clearly moving amongst and bringing radical change.

One of the major themes of Advent is that of using it as a time to reflect on our need to adopt an attitude of heartfelt searching in our lives for anything that is dark which the coming of the light might reveal. One of the most difficult Advent themes to keep in our modern society is that of penitential preparation for Christmas itself. It is meant to have a similar feel to it that Lent has to Easter, a time to examine our lives. This is captured in one of the prayers that can be used in the Advent season.

*Grant us Lord
the wisdom and grace to use aright
the time that is left to us here on earth.
Lead us to repent of our sins
the evil we have done
and the good we have not done;
and strengthen us to follow the steps of your Son
in the way that leads to eternal life
through Jesus Christ our Lord*

Amen.

Perhaps you would like to stop for a few minutes and write on a piece of paper any feelings you have of rejecting Jesus or being resentful of God or anger towards him. Perhaps you may want to consider if there is any sense of fear of the unknown in you. Having identified some of these areas you may like to say the prayer above either together as a group or later on your own.

3) Finally we are reminded that this season of light brings Hope

While I am in the world, I am the light of the world

There is a hint here of something much deeper. It appears that Jesus being in the world in this context is something that is time limited, something almost conditional. This is emphasised by his comment

Night is coming when no one can work

John 9 v4

Also we gain a sense that a full revelation of what it means for Jesus to be the light of the world has not been completed. Even the man who received his sight initially appears to be only some way to comprehending just who the man who healed him is.

Initially he declares Jesus to be a prophet (John 9v19)

Then on further questioning he states

If this man were not from God, he could do nothing

John 9 v32.

Later he makes the declaration John desires all his readers to make

Lord I believe and he worshipped him.

John 9v38

This progressive revelation and growing belief is reflected in the wider plan of John's gospel. The *I am* sayings build up a picture of the identity of Jesus during his earthly ministry and culminate to a fuller revelation of Jesus true identity in the last week of Jesus life which John devotes nearly half his gospel too. So when Jesus speaks in this passage of

The night that is coming

he may be referring to the darkness of his arrest, crucifixion and death. He may be warning them as he speaks that there is little time left with them before he is taken from them. Certainly this is a theme that John emphasises later in his gospel.

My children, I will be with you only a little longer.

John 13 v33

There is to be a cataclysmic battle with the forces of darkness that can only be defeated by death on a cross and the self sacrifice of this Son of Man. It can seem when it get's really dark and when the power of evil seem so powerfully either personally or nationally or globally that we can lose hope.

This loss of hope has been experienced in the last century marked at is was by two world wars, the threat of nuclear annihilation and now the devastating effects of our own stupidity represented by HIV/AIDS and global warming.

Edward Gray, Secretary of State for foreign affairs looked from his office window in London as the gas lighter doused the lights outside at dawn at the start of WW1.

*"The lamps are going out all over Europe;
we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime."*

Edward Grey, Secretary of State for foreign affairs at the outbreak of WW1

Yet there is in the words of Aslan the Lion in the Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe, a deeper magic at work here.

Advent points to this deeper magic as it places the first coming of Jesus into a much wider perspective of God's overall plan for the whole world. We are reminded by John not only of Jesus work at the beginning (John 1v1) but also of a time when Jesus will return and

take you to be with me that you may also be where I am.

John 14 v3

Jesus is not only the babe born in Bethlehem he is also the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. (Rev 21v6)

Whilst there is fear, anxiety and anger leading to judgement for those who will not receive Jesus or believe in him, to those that do, there is the right to become children of God.

*Yet to all who received him,
to those who believed in his name,
he gave the right to become children of God*

John 1v12

Nicodemus who came at night can see the kingdom of God if he is willing to be born again. (John 3v3)
Jesus promises that

*I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness
but will have the light of life.*

John 8 v12

However dark it gets, the light is stronger and eventually Jesus gains the victory over the powers of darkness as he did physically in this man, so that all have the possibility of life, and life eternal. He sends his Holy Spirit so we may continue to live in hope as we follow him, and walk in the light rather than dwell in the darkness. One day he will come again and take us to be with him and this is the hope that can be never taken from us, no matter what man may do to us.

Jesus being the light of the world speaks of the hope that goes beyond the limitations of being tied to one people in one area for one time.

Jesus coming is so that he is the Light of the World

- for all people
- and for all time

as even death itself cannot extinguish the light.

Conclusion

Advent is a season of Light that can bring

- joy,
- judgement
- and hope.

What sort of season it is for you and me depends our response to Jesus the light of the world.

Witness

Pass to each person an unlit candle which you collectively light from the central candle.

As you all hold the candles in the darkness

Say together the special Prayer for Advent (the collect)

Almighty God

give us grace to cast away the darkness

and to put on the armour of light,

now in the time of this mortal life,

in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility

that on the last day

when he shall come again in his glorious majesty

to judge the living and the dead

we may rise to the life immortal:

Amen

Before blowing the candles out individually think who you might give this candle to as a gift to them that Jesus is the light of the world and they can have this candle as a symbol of bringing light into any area of darkness in their lives.