

Year A, March 26, 2017
4 Lent
Christ Church, Mexia

You've got to love Lent! - long, long gospels full of content - so much to process. Well, "(a) little girl was reciting memory work in front of the entire church. In front of such a crowd her mind went blank. In the front row, her mother was almost as frantic as the little girl.

The mother gestured, moved her lips, trying to form the words for the girl, but it did no good. Finally, the mother, in desperation, whispered the opening phrase of the memorized scripture: 'I am the light of the world.' Immediately the child's face lit up and relaxed and a smile appeared on it as she said with supreme confidence: 'My mother is the light of the world!'" (Hodgin, 608)

Well, she may have been - and that is the topic I wish to pursue. We need to be the light of the world today. Light is very important to us. According to Genesis, the first act of creation was "let there be light." Think about what light means to your life. What would it be like if you had no light?

Ronald Nikkel recalls a story of when Charles Colson and other religious leaders met with President Borja of Ecuador to discuss Prison Fellowship International's ministry. "They had no sooner been seated in luxurious leather chairs when the president interrupted the conversation with the story of his own imprisonment years before being elected to the presidency. He had been involved in the struggle for democracy in Ecuador. The military cracked down, and he was arrested. Without trial, they threw him into a cold dungeon with no light and no window. For three days, he endured the solitary fear and darkness that can drive a person mad.

Just when the situation seemed unbearable, the huge steel door opened, and someone crept into the darkness. Borja heard the person working on something in the opposite corner. Then the figure crept out, closed the door and disappeared. Minutes later the room suddenly blazed with light. Someone, perhaps taking his life into his hands, had connected electricity to the broken light fixture: 'From that moment,' explained President Borja, 'my imprisonment had meaning because at least I could see.'" (Rowell, p 261). Light provided him with hope and comfort.

The importance of light cannot be overstated for us, our plants, etc. Of course, when we think of physical light, either from the sun or man-made inventions, there are limitations. While light moves at a very fast speed, it can only travel so far, depending upon the strength of its source. And it travels only in straight lines – it cannot bend around corners for example. So, it creates shadows. But you know, hopefully, that when Jesus says, “I am the light of the world,” that he is speaking of more than just physical light – a light that we, that all people, need even more than physical light.

The miracle of the story is not that Jesus gave the blind man the ability to see, any more than the scandal is that he did it on the Sabbath. The man received much more than his sight. But think about how it unfolds.

First, the man hears Jesus - he can't see him because he's blind. He doesn't physically see Jesus until verse 35 in this scripture, after he truly understands what Jesus has done. He has told the neighbors, the Pharisees, and his parents about Jesus. He stands up to the pressure of people disputing his account; he is comfortable in his knowledge, his belief. This belief develops gradually through his telling of the story, until he recognizes who Jesus is - like with the Samaritan woman at the well. At first, she hears Jesus, engages in conversation with him until eventually she begins to comprehend that he is from God, and then to worshipping him as Lord. This doesn't happen at the speed of light – wham! But rather it happens more like the dawn, where night transitions to day – slowly, the increasing light bringing more and more recognition to the objects around us.

So, what does all of this mean for us? First, it takes a while for us to understand and come to a belief about who Jesus truly is. It takes time to understand that the light of Jesus can definitely penetrate all of the darkness within us and around us – it bends around any corners and reaches into the crevices that contain our deepest, darkest secrets and fears, and frees us. It takes a while to understand that we need him. We need God. Maybe you aren't totally there yet; that's OK. It is a journey. And it is very difficult to rely on God instead of ourselves.

Secondly, we need to be the light of Jesus to the world. We need to let the light of Jesus shine through us. But how? Jesus changed the life of the Samaritan woman by giving her dignity, by giving her purpose, by giving her a new identity, by asking her to do something for him – give him a drink of water. He gives the blind man sight that

lifts him out of his marginalized place in society, allows him to overcome the barriers that the system and everyone had set for him, and still tried to set for him. No money exchanged hands in either of these stories. Jesus raised them up as a person; allowed them to overcome their problems.

That's why relationships are so important in doing the work of God. We need to know the people whom we are trying to help and try to understand what is holding them back through empathy – what will encourage them to change. Addicts, for example, need to acknowledge the addiction before they can find the strength and ways to overcome it. The poor may need hope, or education, or job skills, or confidence to find a way to get out of poverty. Mostly, they may need a friend, an example, someone to express caring and love for them as a person, a human being. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul calls upon them, and us by extension, to "live as children of the light." If the Samaritan woman and the man born blind can change through their encounter with Christ and do the work of God, can't we?

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.