

ADVENT 3: TELL!

John 1:6-9 [MW17-39]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 17 December 2017

Q: How many consultants does it take to change a light bulb?

A: I'll have an estimate for you a week from Monday.

Q: How many computer programmers does it take to change a light bulb?

A: None. That's a hardware problem.

Q: How many circus performers does it take to change a lightbulb ?

A: Four. One to change the bulb and three to sing, Ta da!

Thank goodness Jesus is the light of the world

- he shines eternally
- and never needs changing!

So, what's something related that many people do at this time of year ... ???

- I'm not going to give too many clues
- but people often walk or drive around at night to see this ...
- lots of people put up "Christmas lights", inside and outside of all varieties, shapes, colours, capabilities
- and it's really great to see, to share, to enjoy
- adds to the whole festive celebration atmosphere
- and makes this time of year special

In the northern hemisphere, where most of our Christmas traditions began

- Christmas comes very near to the shortest day – longest night
- lights shining out in the darkness have a real dramatic impact
- conveying brightness and warmth and hope
- it's nowhere near as dark here, but the message is the same:
- the light of the world has come and is coming
- Christmas lights, whether people are conscious of it or not
- tell this same message
- that the Light of the World has overcome the darkness!

Flashing, dancing, twinkling, multi-coloured lights

- relay the joy and delight of God's love
- revealed in Jesus Christ
- the One whose coming we are preparing to celebrate

How often have you sung the carol "Joy to the World"?

- Christmas lights are a sign of this joy
- a sign of the delight the Lord God takes in all creation
- the delight the Lord God takes in each one of us and wishes to share with us
- people don't just put up lights - they put them up on and in things
- around houses, trees and using them to spell words of celebration
- Christmas lights make the ordinary extraordinary
- they draw attention to things we see every day ... houses, trees, gardens ...
- reminding us, telling us, there is something more to celebrate

Twice in only three verses this morning's gospel reading says

- John came to tell about the light
the light that was coming into the world
- so telling about the light must be top priority

Pastor Colin Smith reflects on this, writing:

When I studied at Moody Bible Institute in the downtown Chicago, December brought about two battling desires. The first desire was to finish the mountain of papers and finals before me. The second desire was to simply walk around the city, bathing in the bright Christmas décor. There was nothing I enjoyed more than Chicago on those cold December nights. While the stars were usually absent from the city sky, every December they would come down to rest in the bare trees of the city; the Lincoln Park Zoo would remain open in the evenings to showcase their symphony of lights; the Christkindlmarket in Daley Plaza would be illuminated by a bright, festive tree. And I wasn't the only one who enjoyed the lights during this time of year. There's something about their bright glow that overcomes the natural human inclination to stay warm, driving thousands upon thousands of people to the ice-cold climate of the streets of Chicago. Lights have the amazing power of drawing people by their glow.

More so, Christmas lights can teach us something significant about how to share the good news of the gospel this time of year ...

... So how do we point people to the true Light during the Christmas season? No doubt, many of us will be visiting with family or friends who don't know Jesus Christ. As we celebrate Christmas, there are two simple, unobtrusive ways that we can point people to the light of the world.

1. Ask to read the Christmas story out loud.

The Word of God has amazing power in itself, so ask those you are celebrating with if you can read part or all of the Christmas story as found in the Gospel of Luke. It may seem to lead to nothing, but it might also start a great conversation with some of your unbelieving friends and family. At the very least, people will hear why we are truly celebrating this season.

2. Ask to pray.

As you sit down for a meal with friends and family, simply ask to pray in thanksgiving for what we celebrate at Christmas. The prayer doesn't need to be something profound but something that worships God for sending us a great Saviour, something that shows the great joy that you have within you.

So what exactly does this "light"

- the light that John is to tell about
the light that is coming
- the light that has come
that we are preparing to celebrate at Christmas
- what does this light "do"?

In a darkened laboratory in 1895, Wilhelm Roentgen got the surprise of his life. He rigged an induction coil and a mercury circuit breaker to a vacuum tube. When he switched on the current, to his amazement, a tray of barium crystals on a nearby bench began to glow. He then placed a sheet of lead between the crystals, and the tube and the crystals darkened. When he reached to remove the lead, to his increased amazement, his hand appeared in skeleton form. Unable to account for this phenomenon, he called the causative factor x-ray.

An x-ray makes light where no light is expected. It penetrates and uncovers things that are normally hidden. It shows what usually can't be seen.

Christmas is the birth date of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. The light of Jesus uncovers who you are created to be. It shows your true and authentic nature.

It reveals your heart of love. The light of Jesus puts you in touch with a greater virtue, and moves you to gratitude and generosity. It focuses on God's purpose for you, and it unfolds God's plan for you. It gives you a cadence of affirmation by which to march confidently forward in life.

You are more loving, more generous, more giving, and more forgiving when you stand in the light of Jesus.

You are more generous, more giving, more forgiving
- when you stand in the light of Jesus

Here's a short story about a couple who did just that, very simply and effectively:

There was a childless couple who had raised their orphaned nephew who is now leaving them for college. They're at the railroad station. The story relates, "David looked at his aunt and uncle. She, with hands chapped and hard from selling fruit and vegetables outdoors in all kinds of weather, face ruddy and round and invariably smiling, the heavy body more accustomed to a half dozen sweaters at one time than a single coat, her hair the color of moonlight now, but the dark eyes still bright. He, with his slight, wiry body strong and bent from lifting too many fruit and vegetable crates for too many years, the wind-burned skin, the swarthy face, the wry mouth; the childless couple who had taken the orphan David into their home, rearing him since the age of seven yet refusing to be called Mamma and Papa for fear he would forget his real parents. David grabbed their rough peddlers' hands in his smooth student ones. 'How can I ever repay you two for what you've done for me?' His uncle spoke gently, 'David, there's a saying, 'The love of parents goes to their children, but the love of these children goes to their children.'" 'That's not so,' protested David, 'I'll always be trying to . . .'. 'His aunt interrupted. 'David,' she said, 'what your uncle means is that a parent's love isn't to be paid back. It can only be passed on.'"

"It cannot be paid back, it can only be passed on"

- similarly, what is our response to the light we have received in Jesus Christ?
yes we can be grateful and say thank you
- we can also pass it on, doing what John did
telling about the light

Besides pointing people to the Light

- we can also be the light as we are out and about
Jesus in his sermon on the mount tells people:
"You are the light of the world ... In the same way let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven"
(Matthew 5:16)
- we are lights to the world insofar as we reflect the character of Jesus
so, in a world where many people find this time of year particularly stressful
and are apt to complain about the little things
- let's be different than those around us
let's not be short-tempered or sharp with people,
rather let us show people the grace and love of Jesus

Pastor Colin Smith encourages people to memorise Philippians 2:14-15 for this season:

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

Get near enough to others this Advent and Christmas season

- in order to shine the Light of Christ upon them
and you know how things work when you light a gas barbecue?
you light the first burner, turn on the gas on the next burner
and it lights from that first one ... ?
- be with other people in that same way
so you can enable them to be ignited with the Light of Jesus

This Christmas season, let's point people to the great Light of the world

- the Saviour of all peoples
let's also be lights, ourselves, showing the greatness of the character of Jesus
by reflecting him to a world that lives in darkness

[silence]

Let us pray:

Dear God,

bring the light you are to the life we live.

Brighten our days and guard our nights,

and help us to reflect the light of Your presence and goodness to others.

Amen.