

## Building a Community in Christ 1: LIGHT

Isaiah 9:2-4, Matthew 4:23-25 [MW20-05]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Kaiwaka and Wellsford, Sunday 02 February 2020

Ever seen one of these? [Slide 1]

- for many years, when our three children were growing up these were a familiar sight around our house
- they are “Globugs” [Slide 2]  
when our children were younger waking up in the night was scary so we gave them each a “Globug”
- you put it by the light for a while  
it 'absorbs' the light and then 'glows' in the dark [Slide 3]
- pretty nifty! and the kids thought they were great  
they were fun and meant waking in the middle of the night, in the dark was not so frightening

Dark – Light [Slide 4]

- you can't get much more of a contrast than that  
dark is bad, light is good
- the prophet Isaiah put it very clearly: [Slide 5]  
*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined.*

Those people who had been dwelling in the shadows had seen a bright light

- they were rescued  
they had been given a new lease of life  
they had something to celebrate!
- at Christmas and Epiphany we celebrate the coming into our world [Slide 6]  
the one the prophet foretold
- the one who is 'the light of the world': Jesus Christ

That's the good news

- people need no longer be afraid of the dark  
there is a light, a light which leads to life
- wake up in the middle of the night - see the light, find your way  
see the light, follow Jesus, discover life

And we see just that in our gospel reading [Slide 7]

- it is just three verses but it sure gives the picture:  
Jesus bursts on the scene, news about him spreads  
and people flock to him
- Matthew 4:25  
*Great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and beyond the Jordan*

That's some pulling power!

- Jesus is a “people magnet”!  
because he has the words that re-connect them to God  
the words that fill up their empty spaces, soothe their hurts  
and direct them on the right path
- Jesus restores them, heals their sickness of body, mind and spirit  
people came to him and followed him all over the place

Like when you're camping and you get to that still, cool part of the night

- you're sitting outside the tent or caravan  
the sun has just gone down so you light the lantern [Slide 8]  
so you can enjoy reading your book in peace
- next thing you know there are 13,247 winged insects  
moths, mosquitos, beetles all buzzing around
- it's instant! Just like that!  
one second it's all quiet ... then on with the light and they're there!

People were drawn to Jesus like moths to a flame

- because in him was the light of life: [Slide 9]  
wake up in the middle of the night - see the light, find your way  
see the light, follow Jesus, discover life
- pretty simple isn't it?  
only somehow it isn't because our world is still full of darkness
- yes, the light has come and it is stronger than darkness  
John 1:5 gives us this promise [Slide 10]  
*The light keeps shining in the dark, and the darkness has never put it out*

But the darkness remains, even in our own beloved Aotearoa New Zealand

- violence and anger, inequality and injustice, hunger and poverty  
people mistreated and abused, homelessness and unemployment  
the list, unfortunately, goes on ...
- you only have to pick up the newspaper, watch the TV news [Slide 11]  
to see the shadows which criss-cross our world and our lives

The light has come and the darkness cannot overcome it

- so why are people not drawn to that light? [Slide 12]  
do they think they are not in darkness? do they prefer the dark?  
or is there some reason they cannot see the light?
- what prevents them from seeing Jesus?  
something must be getting in the way  
otherwise wouldn't it be like in our gospel reading, with crowds flocking to Jesus?
- I confess I don't know ... it's a big question  
too big and too important to give a quick superficial answer  
something to ponder

However this I do know:

- wake up in the middle of the night - see the light, find your way  
see the light, follow Jesus, discover life
- in light of this, three things:

First, "be a globug" [Slide 13]

- absorb the light  
how? by gathering as church, like today  
reading the Bible, praying, meeting and talking with other followers of Jesus
- maybe often you won't be noticed  
but just like our children discovered, when it's the middle of the night  
when shadows fall and darkness descends, then a globug stands out
- shine as a beacon of hope, joy, guidance, encouragement  
everyone here has the capacity to draw near to Jesus  
absorb his light, and take it wherever you go

Second, maybe we could see our church as a lighthouse [Slide 14]

- shining with a light so bright that it stands out even on a clear summer day and draws people in
- this year, how can we, as a church, be a light that draws people to Jesus?

Third, consider this from one of my all time favourite writers, Max Lucado it's called "Will You Share the Light?" [Slide 15]

Long ago or maybe not so long ago, there was a tribe in a dark, cold cavern.

The cave dwellers would huddle together and cry against the chill. Loud and long they wailed. It was all they did. It was all they knew to do. The sounds in the cave were mournful, but the people didn't know it, for they had never known joy. The spirit in the cave was death, but the people didn't know it, for they had never known life.

But then, one day, they heard a different voice. "I have heard your cries," it announced. "I have felt your chill and seen your darkness. I have come to help."

The cave people grew quiet. They had never heard this voice. Hope sounded strange to their ears. "How can we know you have come to help?"

"Trust me," he answered. "I have what you need."

The cave people peered through the darkness at the figure of the stranger. He was stacking something, then stooping and stacking more.

"What are you doing?" one cried, nervous.

The stranger didn't answer.

"What are you making?" one shouted even louder.

Still no response.

"Tell us!" demanded a third.

The visitor stood and spoke in the direction of the voices. "I have what you need." With that he turned to the pile at his feet and lit it. Wood ignited, flames erupted, and light filled the cavern. [Slide 16]

The cave people turned away in fear. "Put it out!" they cried. "It hurts to see it."

"Light always hurts before it helps," he answered. "Step closer. The pain will soon pass."

"Not I," declared a voice.

"Nor I," agreed a second.

"Only a fool would risk exposing his eyes to such light."

The stranger stood next to the fire. "Would you prefer the darkness? Would you prefer the cold? Don't consult your fears. Take a step of faith."

For a long time no one spoke. The people hovered in groups covering their eyes. The fire builder stood next to the fire. "It's warm here," he invited.

"He's right," one from behind him announced. "It's warmer." The stranger turned and saw a figure slowly stepping toward the fire. "I can open my eyes now," she proclaimed. "I can see."

"Come closer," invited the fire builder.

She did. She stepped into the ring of light. "It's so warm!" She extended her hands and sighed as her chill began to pass. "Come, everyone! Feel the warmth," she invited.

"Silence, woman!" cried one of the cave dwellers. "Dare you lead us into your folly Leave us. Leave us and take your light with you."

She turned to the stranger. "Why won't they come?"

"They choose the chill, for though it's cold, it's what they know. They'd rather be cold than change."

"And live in the dark?"

"And live in the dark."

The now-warm woman stood silent. Looking first at the dark, then at the man.

"Will you leave the fire?" he asked.

She paused, then answered, "I cannot. I cannot bear the cold." Then she spoke again.

"But nor can I bear the thought of my people in darkness."

"You don't have to," he responded, reaching into the fire and removing a stick. "Carry this to your people. Tell them the light is here, and the light is warm. Tell them the light is for all who desire it."

And so she took the small flame and stepped into the shadows.

Kind of sounds like: “Be a globug”!

- when a person is baptised, they are given a candle as these words are said:  
“Walk in the faith of Christ crucified and risen. Shine with the light of Christ.”
- we who are baptised, who are part of the body of Christ  
who are members of a church community  
are reminded that we have been charged to:  
“Walk in the faith of Christ crucified and risen and to shine with the light of Christ.”

Jesus spoke more about this further on in Matthew's gospel, chapter 5

- I'll leave you with his words, from *The Message* translation

[Slide 16]

*You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world.*

*God is not a secret to be kept.*

*We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill ...*

[Slide 17]

*I'm putting you on a lightstand – shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives.*

*By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up to God,*

*this generous Father in heaven.*