

JESUS: LIGHT FOR THE WORLD

John 8:12-18 [MW21-20]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Hakaru, Sunday 30 May 2021

Jesus is 'the light of the world'

- in some ways the meaning is pretty obvious
Jesus is the one to follow
- he will show up what's unhealthy, unhelpful
he will point in the direction that leads to fulfilment, enjoyment, abundant life

Jesus, 'light for the world', is more than that though – there's more to it

- Jesus is also saying when everything looks dark, when it seems hopeless
when all possibility is ended
when there is nothing, it's all blank, a brick wall
when there is that kind of all-enveloping, oppressive, sapping bleak blackness
- there is light
Jesus says it is precisely then I will be your light

Jesus says when you can see no way

- I will *be* the way

Of course, there are thoughtful and carefully argued theological expositions of this

- Jesus even gives some further on in John's gospel
people can read them and study them in commentaries and text books
- however I really like the simplicity and power of what Jesus says:
*I am the light for the world! Follow me, and you won't be walking in the dark.
You will have the light that gives life.*

Perhaps we glimpse something of that in this incident I came across in a book called
In the Eye of the Storm by Max Lucado

This is back 1878, in the Loretto Chapel in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The chapel took five years to complete and is modelled after the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. Its delicate sanctuary contains an altar, a rose window and a choir loft. The choir loft is the reason for wonder. If you had been standing in the newly built chapel in 1878, you would have seen the Sisters of Loretto looking forlornly at the balcony. Everything else was complete: the doors had been hung, the pews had been placed, the floor had been laid. Everything was finished. Even the choir loft. Except for one thing. No stairs.

The chapel was too small to accommodate a conventional stairway. The best builders and designers in the region shook their heads when consulted. "Impossible," they murmured. There simply wasn't enough room. A ladder would serve the purpose, but mar the ambience.

The Sisters of Loretto, whose determination had led them from Kentucky to Santa Fe, now faced a new challenge greater than their journey: a stairway that couldn't be built. What they dreamed of and what they could do were separated by fifteen impossible feet. So what did they do? They did the only thing they could do. They turned to Jesus ... and prayed.

As the story goes, after some days of praying a Mexican carpenter with a wind-burned face appeared at the convent. He explained that he had heard they needed a stairway to a chapel loft. He thought he could help. They had nothing to lose, so they gave him permission.

He went to work with crude tools, painstaking patience and uncanny skill. For eight months he worked. One morning the Sisters of Loretto entered the chapel to find their prayers had been answered.

A masterpiece of carpentry spiralled from the floor to the loft. Two complete three hundred and sixty degree turns. Thirty three steps held together with wooden pegs and no central support. The wood is said to be a variety of hard fir, one non-existent in New Mexico!

When the sisters turned to thank the craftsman, he was gone. He was never seen again. He never asked for money. He never asked for praise. He was a simple carpenter who did what no one else could do so singers could enter a choir loft and sing ...

In the Loretto Chapel in Santa Fe there is a stairway which everyone said couldn't be built. When it was built they said it shouldn't work. But it did and it does.

There was no way ... and yet there was a way ...

Jesus is the stairway

- Jesus says he is the stairway out of the gloom
- Jesus says he is the stairway that climbs out of the darkness
- Jesus says he is the stairway of light to life
- his light shows the way so we can climb up and climb out

Jesus promises to be that light for each one of us

- so that we can enjoy life in all its fullness
- so that we may climb any stairway
- travellers together, followers of the light that gives life

Jesus promises to be our light in any and every situation

- we never need be in darkness
- if we find the blackness closing in
- we can do what those sisters did: turn to Jesus and pray

Jesus says that just as we might carry a torch or a lantern or a candle at night

- so he will be with us in a real and visible and practical way
- he is our friend who will give us encouragement and advice
- he will hang in there when the going is rough
- he will wait for us and watch for us
- even when we don't recognise it or want to know about it
- and he will, when necessary, save us

Jesus is always there for us and won't ever leave us

- that's the promise for you and for me
- that's the promise for all who recognise their place as members of God's family

Each year of Jesus' life is a step – like that stairway in the Loretto Chapel

- 33 paces
- each step of the stair an answered prayer
- he built it so you can climb it
- and not have to whistle in the darkness, but sing!

Jesus says follow me and enjoy the light

- the light that illuminates the way
- the light that will search you out and lead on the path of life

Which is great, just great

- but if you're like me
alongside that wonderful, sweeping, magnificent all-encompassing promise
you'd like something a bit more down to earth and practical
- and the good news is, there is something just like that
something appropriately called "The Laws of the Lighthouse"

What does a lighthouse do?

Jesus may be like a lighthouse in some situations for us

- these "laws" seem to flesh out what Jesus was on about

"The Laws of the Lighthouse" contain immutable, immoveable truths

- candidates for this inventory only qualify if they have 'lighthouse' characteristics:
they warn you of potential danger
they signal safe harbour
they are stronger than the storm
they shine brightest in the fog

The Laws of the Lighthouse contain more than good ideas

- more than personal preferences and honest opinions
they are God-given, time-tested truths, that define the way to navigate life
- observe them and enjoy safe passage
ignore them and crash against the ragged rocks of reality

A young naval officer writes of the importance of obeying "The Laws of the Lighthouse"

Two battleships assigned to the training squadron had been at sea on manoeuvres in heavy weather for several days. I was serving on the lead battleship and was on watch on the bridge as night fell. The visibility was poor in the patchy fog, so the captain remained on bridge, keeping an eye on all activities. Shortly after dark, a lookout on the wing reported, "Light, bearing on the starboard bow." "Is it steady or moving astern?" the captain called out. The lookout replied, "Steady, Captain." This meant we were on a dangerous collision course with that ship.

The captain then called to the signalman, "Signal that ship: We are on a collision course, advise you to alter your course 10 degrees south." Promptly a return message was received: "Alter your course 10 degrees north." The captain was angered; his command had been ignored. So he sent a second message: "Alter your course 10 degrees south - I am the captain!" Soon another message was received: "Alter your course 10 degrees north - I am a seaman third class." Immediately the captain sent a third message, knowing the fear it would evoke: "Alter your course 10 degrees south - I am a battleship." Then the reply came: "Alter your course 10 degrees north - I am a lighthouse."

Here then are the lights to look for and the signals to heed:

(with grateful thanks to Max Lucado)

[Power Point Slides]

*Love God more than you fear hell
Once a week let a child take you on a walk
When no one is watching, live as if someone is
Succeed at home first
Don't spend tomorrow's money today
Pray twice as much as you worry
Listen twice as much as you speak
Only harbour a grudge when God does
Never outgrow your love of sunsets
Treat people like angels – you will meet some and help make some
'Tis wiser to err on the side of generosity than on the side of scrutiny
God has forgiven you, you'd be wise to do the same
When you can't trace God's hand, trust God's heart
Toot your own horn and the notes will be flat
Don't feel guilty for God's goodness
The book of life is lived in chapters, so know your page number
Never let the important be the victim of the trivial
Live your liturgy*

Don't worry if you can't remember all that – I have some copies to give out

To sum it all up

- approach life like a voyage on a schooner [Power Point Slide]
enjoy the view, explore the vessel, make friends with the captain, fish a little
- then get off when you get home
that is living in the light!