



“Time with God at Home”

July Theme - Isaiah 2 : 5

“Walking in Gods Light”

In June’s “Time with God at home” we focussed on the isolation of David. In Psalm 142 we found David running from his enemies and “imprisoned” (Verse 7) alone in a cave. Feeling locked away from God and all the familiar things he knew. We see David not only crying out to God (1-4) but through prayer and his call to God we see that eventually he begins to see hope in his darkness.

In the bible there are 272 references to light - 177 in the Old Testament and 95 in the New Testament (KJV). In many cases this use of the word light refers to something that is positive (Genesis 1:4), guiding (1 John 1: 5-9), illuminating (Exodus 13:21), and life-giving (1 Peter 2:9). And yet at the same time it is not something God forces upon us. In order to be in God's light we have to make a choice to step into it and to allow it to illuminate our path. I guess this feels ok when we are secure and know where we are going but what about those times when we suddenly feel we don't know the path ahead?

Week one - Just enough light for the step I am on

I know for me personally the last 6 months have felt like I am walking a very unfamiliar path. Health challenges, leaving the familiarity of my old job and the settled community I was living in, moving to an unknown community and new church family and on top of all of that the Covid-19 lockdown. I have felt that my secure and known path has been thrown into chaos. Many days I have found myself asking God for his illumination, but being the impatient type of person I can sometimes be, I have wanted him to show me the path of the next 12 months NOW!!! “*Why can't I have all the light I need right now, Lord?*” I hear myself saying. My natural instinct is that I want to feel secure and in control and know exactly what is going to happen...but is this REALLY trust? If I know the path before me, am I really walking by faith? Hebrews 11: 1 - 40 is an amazing passage of scripture that reminds us of the many, many people who walked by faith. Why don't you take a moment to read this scripture and ask God to illuminate the places in your life where you may need to trust God more for the unknown path you are treading right now.

Prayer Light

Father God, I don't want to take one step without you. I reach up for your hand and ask that you lead me in your way. Thank you that no matter where I am right now, even if I have taken myself way off course, in this moment as I put my hand in yours, I trust that you will make a path from here, to where I need to be. I love that your grace abounds to me in that way. Keep me on the path you have for me and take me where you want me to go.

“Cause me to know the way in which I should walk” (Psalm 143:8).

I commit this day to walk your way.

Amen

Week Two - This Little Light of Mine

Do you remember singing this song at church? I have fond memories of singing this song as part of my regular Sunday School sessions BUT I had no idea of its origins.

Verse 1: This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Verse 2: Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine, Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine. Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Verse 3: In my brother's heart, I'm gonna let it shine, In my brother's heart, I'm gonna let it shine. In my brother's heart, I'm gonna let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Verse 4: In my sister's soul, I'm gonna let it shine, In my sister's soul, I'm gonna let it shine. In my sister's soul, I'm gonna let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Verse 5: All around the world, I'm gonna let it shine. All around the world, I'm gonna let it shine. All around the world, I'm gonna let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Verse 6: This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Background to song:

"This Little Light of Mine" is a gospel song that came to be an anthem of the civil rights movement in the 1950's and 60's. Often mistakenly believed to have been sung on plantations during slavery, it was originally written by Harry Dixon Loes around 1920 as a children's song. During the Civil Rights Movement, Zilphia Horton adapted the song and taught it to Pete Seeger. The song is famously tied to Civil Rights leader, Fannie Lou Hamer. While being detained by police on her way back from attempting to register to vote with other members of her community, she began singing this song.

Reflection

During the last month we saw in the media the controversial and tragic death of George Floyd. Following his death many around the world have joined together to rally support for those in the minority in our society and created the rallying cry of "Black Lives Matter". But is this something Christians should be involved in?

The Bible is definitely not silent about the rage of the oppressed. One of the most startlingly violent passages in the Bible comes from the lips of the disinherited. In Psalm 137 the psalmist says,

“Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us. Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.”

How can wishing such an atrocity make any sense in a religious text? Psalm 137 is a psalm of the traumatized. It depicts the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem, the sacking of the city, sexual assault and brutalization of the innocent. What kind of song do you write if you are forced to watch the murder of your wife, your child, your neighbour? Would it have echoes of “This little light of mine”?

Psalm 137 is trauma literature, the rage of those who lived. The question isn't why the Psalmist wrote this. The question is what kind of song would the families of George Floyd be tempted to write after watching the video of his death? It would be raw and unfiltered. But more than an expression of rage, this psalm is a written record in time. It is a call to remember. This psalm, just like the song, “This little light of mine”, requires us to consider the trauma that led to their composition.

The miracle of the Bible is not just that it records the rage of the oppressed. The miracle is that it is able to look upon oppression and still speak of hope. The same texts that include a call for vengeance upon Israel's enemies look to the salvation of its oppressors. Isaiah 49 says, “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.” For Christians, rage (Psalm 137) must eventually give way to hope (Isaiah 49). And we find the spiritual resources to make this transition at the cross. Jesus could have called down the Psalms of rage upon his enemies and shouted a final word of defiance before he breathed his last. Instead he called for forgiveness: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,” he says in Luke 23. It was not a false reconciliation: Jesus experienced the reality of state-sponsored terror. That is why some say that the black Christian has always felt a particular kinship with this crucified king from an oppressed ethnic group. The cross helps us make sense of the lynching tree.

And Jesus' resurrection three days after his crucifixion shows that neither the lynching tree nor the cross have the final say about those whom God values. Jesus' profound act of forgiving his opponents provides me with the theological resources to hope.

Dare we speak of hope when chants of “I can't breathe” echo in the streets? Do we risk the criticism commonly levied at Christians that we move too quickly to hope because faith pacifies? Resurrection hope doesn't remove the Christian from the struggle for justice. It empties the state's greatest weapon — the fear of death — of its power.

Hope is possible if we recognize that it does not rule out justice. It is what separates justice from vengeance. Howard Thurman wrote in his classic work “Jesus and the Disinherited” about how rage, once unleashed, tends to spill out beyond its intended target and consume everything. The hatred of our enemy that we take to the streets returns with us to our friendships, marriages and communities. It damages our own souls.

Christians contend for justice because we care about black lives, families and communities. We contend for reconciliation after the establishment of justice because there must be a future that is more than mutual contempt and suspicion. But justice and reconciliation cannot come at the cost of black lives. The only peaceful future is a just future. And because Christians should be a people for peace, we must be a people for justice even when it seems ever to elude us. Too many black lives have been lost to accept anything else.

So if we return to the song from the beginning, “This little light of mine”, how can this help us to appreciate each other more, feel closer to each other, feel more understanding and empathetic

towards one another. What would our society and churches be like if each of us could appreciate everyone else and help each other to “let our light shine?”

Take a moment in silence to think about who in your life helps your little light to shine? What do they do that helps your light shine?

Each one of us has a little light inside of us. What is the light that you bring? For yourself, your friends, your family, the community, the school, our carers or the world? Using whatever art materials you have to hand, you may want to create your own “little light” art project. Maybe use construction paper or an empty toilet roll to represent a candle and a flame. Draw either a picture of yourself, head to toe, or a large drawing of your hands. Glue/sellotape the candle so your hands are holding it. Above the picture, write “My little light is...” and add your own ideas.

A prayer from Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church:

Loving and forgiving God, we come to you today recognising that in matters of ethnicity we have no choice – we are who we have been made to be. Before you we rejoice at our diversity, and our hearts lift at your great vision of a worshipping multitude gathered from every nation, tribe, people and language. But nonetheless we recognise that our present reality is very far from this ideal.

We have each of us been shaped by different forces; some of us have been ground down, whilst others have been built up. Some of us have been worn away, or have become fractured and broken. Some of us have found life a burden rather than a joy. None of us have experienced the perfect life. Some of us have inherited power, whilst others of us have inherited powerlessness.

Some of us have been born white, in a world where whiteness confers privilege.

Others of us have been born black, in a world where darker skin carries disadvantage.

We know that this is not the world as you would have it be, but it is our world, and it has been our experience.

None of us asked for our skin colour, none of us asked to be born the heirs of oppression, none of us asked to inherit power or powerlessness.

So before you, and in the name of Jesus Christ who loves all people equally, regardless of ethnicity, gender or social status, we come now to recommit ourselves to your vision of the world.

We come now to pray ‘your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven’, and to offer ourselves once to live out your coming kingdom of equality and justice in our lives, in our churches, and in our communities.

And so we confess our own complicity in the status quo which divides and distorts humanity. As we pray, we ask that you will release us from guilt, and will help us to find ways of laying down the burdens we have inherited.

Help us to discover our true and rightful place within the new humanity created in Christ Jesus. All races together, we confess that we have sinned, and that we have fallen short of the glory of God.

We confess our failures to speak out against injustice. We confess those times when, as individuals and as churches, we have witnessed the fracturing of humanity along ethnic grounds, and yet have remained silent. We confess those times when we have been the powerful ones and have chosen to withhold that power whilst another human suffered.

We confess the sin of racist exclusion, the abuse of power to oppress and demean. May those of us who have ourselves experienced exclusion be the first to speak up for others. May we create spaces for reconciliation.

We pray for our churches. May they become places of reconciliation, where each human soul is valued, and where equality in Christ is a reality in our midst. Forgive us those times where we do not live out our calling as your people. May our churches model the new humanity of Christ to those in the communities where we live.

We pray for our communities. Where there is division, may we bring restoration. Where there is inequality may we bring justice. Where there is powerlessness may we lift up the broken hearted. Where there is damage may we bring healing.

Loving and forgiving God, hear our confession, hear the desires of our hearts to be different, grant us your forgiveness, and remake us according to the likeness of Christ.

Amen.

Week Three - Dancing in Gods footlights

Like many other people, I love going to the theatre. The drama, excitement, the thrill of the unfolding story and the laughter, particularly of pantomimes, has provided me and my family many happy memories. However, never once did I stop to thank the lighting people for their amazing work. It wasn't until my eldest son decided to study theatre light management at university that I began to see the true value of this essential aspect of theatre. You see, without this specialised work the actors would have been at a total loss delivering their art. They literally would have been "In the dark!!". The lights provided however are not just for the benefit of the audience. How many of you have seen the lights at the front of a stage? The lights which are level with the performers feet, have you ever wondered what purpose they serve? Let me **enlighten** you.

Footlights - Modern footlights, usually recessed into the floor of the stage, can be used to provide a soft, diffuse light that cuts any harsh shadows caused by the other forms of stage lighting and provides a bright yet natural setting for the actor. (Encyclopedia Britannica).

You see without these footlights actors may easily fall off the front of the stage or even worse still into the orchestra pit below. The footlights provide a guide for the actors and help to keep the actors safe. Did you know we too have footlights supplied by God? Psalm 119: 105 says this "Thy word is a lamp unto my

feet, and a light unto my path". God's scripture is more than just a book but a light and guide to a way of life.

Now I realise that some people may have read the Bible cover to cover, studied over many years and even been taught how to recite it verbatim BUT is that sufficient enough to keep us safely on the path today? A miner will never go down into a dark mine without first checking to make sure the light on his cap has sufficient power to last the entire time he is down there and it is this type of diligence we too should be paying towards God's word. The light we receive from God's word MUST be renewed, revitalised, and solidly re-established daily. When God's truth is renewed in us daily, it becomes like our miners light. People who say the Bible isn't relevant today perhaps say this because they don't know the author. They might read the bible like a storybook or a history lesson. They gain facts from it, but miss out on the power behind it. As Christians, if we immerse ourselves in God's word, press in deeper and deeper, and know its power we can see God's truth renewed to us each day.

Have you ever received a love letter? Or a letter from a dear friend? If you are anything like me you may have saved them so that you can reread them over and over again. For me each time I reread one of these letters it makes me feel close to the one who wrote it. One very important card for me is the last Mother's Day card my son, Luke, sent me before his death in 2013. Every year on Mother's Day I display this card alongside the one his brother sends me and it reminds me of the wonderful and blessed relationship I had with my son. It also helps me to feel close to him in a tangible way. I guess when he bought and wrote it, he would never have known the ongoing significance of this simple card and to anyone else it is JUST a card. BUT like God's word because I knew/know and love the author it holds so much life for me.

Do we hunger for those same things from God? How much do we appreciate God's love letter? Read Psalm 119:130 and 119:165. According to these scriptures, what does God's word give you? When you read God's word, do you have more peace, clarity, security, or direction? You may want to write out a prayer asking God to make his word come alive in you and speak into your heart. Or you may want to write out a prayer asking God to help you understand and retain his word in greater depth than you have ever known before.

Prayer Light

Lord, shine the light of your word on the path of my life today. Make it a lamp for my feet so that I do not stumble. Bring it alive in my spirit so that it illuminates my mind and soul. Let it be a guide for every decision I make, every step I take. Keep me from turning to the right or the left so that I will stay on the narrow path that leads me to life. Help me daily to carve out time to be with you alone and to feed on your truth

(Psalm 119:97).



Week Four - Continuing the journey in the light

Do you ever wish you could sneak into God's planning room and just have a little look at what lies ahead? What the next 6 months might hold? Clues to the next direction of travel? I remember after the turmoil of my marriage falling apart, my son dying and being made redundant all in the space of 14 months I really wanted to be able to know the path ahead for me and my family. All of my solid ground had been stripped away, and I felt that I was jumping from rock to rock in the ever flowing, sinking river of lava. Each time I thought I was stable and able to rest, along came some more lava to melt away my rock of stability. Worry encompassed my mind daily. If only I had rested on the scripture of 1 Corinthians 2:9;

“No eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him.”

Instead, I was like an eager child wanting to get to the sweet shop on the other side of the road. Pulling against God, all I could focus on was the possibility of better times. But like a small child I could not see the juggernaut heading straight towards me. God could. For my own safety he held me back, gently reassuring me that I will get my reward but would need to be patient.

Have you ever felt like this? Now I am not saying it is a bad thing to plan for our future or set goals for ourselves BUT if those plans or goals are so strong that they sacrifice everything to achieve them, then are we allowing God to direct our lives? Walking with God means living moment by moment with Him in the present.

In the recent time of Covid-19 we have all had to learn a new way of living. Planning our days according to the latest guidance from the government, waiting to see how far we can be from each other, whether we can meet outside or inside, with one other or with a crowd. So if we can follow the instructions of the government, how much should we want to follow the instructions of God? God says not to be anxious about tomorrow, for there will be plenty of things to concern you when you get there. Instead walk as a child of the light, knowing that your future can only be reached one step at a time today. Trust that God will give you the light you need, where you are right now, to make the right step.

Prayer Light

Lord, I want to live my life the way you want me to every day. Help me not to be stuck in my past, or so geared toward the future that I miss the richness of the present. Help me to experience the wealth in each moment. Let me be content that if you are not moving me then this place is right for me at this time. Let me deeply understand the richness of walking with you step by step. Help me Lord to get beyond myself and become an open vessel through which your light can shine. Give me wisdom and revelation and show me all I need to keep me walking with you. Enable me to step out of the past and keep an eye on the future by following your light on my path today.

AMEN

