

*The "I Am Sayings of Jesus
Lenten - 2018*

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*"Knowing God's Guidance -
I Am the Light of the World"*

March 4, 2018

*Key Texts: John 7:1-5
John 8:12*

I. Introduction – A Review of Jesus as the Bread of Life

Are you hungry for God? Do you want to go deeper? Those are the words that stuck out for me last week as Denise shared about Jesus saying, "I am the bread of life." Jesus said, "unless you eat my body and drink my blood, you have no part of me." Many likely found this a bit disgusting and provocative and wondered who does this guy think he is, God? Many walked away for following Jesus that day. He told them, "This bread is my flesh and my blood is drink, and I will give my life to the world and if you feed on this bread you will live forever; for all eternity (vs 51, vs 58).

For the most part, we like Jesus' disciples see life being so temporary, so short. God sees our lives as eternal and when we choose Jesus to be our Lord and Savior, our bread of life, we come to understand this flesh and blood language as symbolic. Jesus says in John 6:63, "The Spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing." It's just that "the word, Jesus, became flesh to come and dwell among us, so that we can relate better to God and know God better.

Understanding the "I Am" sayings of Jesus from John's gospel are intended to do just that. To help us get to know God, Jesus and ourselves better.

II. A Movement from Darkness to Light

Jesus says, "I am the Light of the World." The truth is, the Bible is a story of moving from darkness to light.

If we go back to the beginning and Genesis 1, the scripture says, "the earth was formless and empty and darkness was over the surface of the deep." What was the very first thing God created? God said, "Let there be light, and there was light." (Gen 1:3)

When John speaks of Jesus in John 1 that thought continues. Verse 4 says, "In him was life, and that light was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it."

When we light our candles on Christmas Eve, we do so from the Christ-candle and announce Jesus is the light of the world and then we pass the Christ light to one another until the darkness becomes a warm, bright glow across the congregation. We share the light of Christ with each other.

Let's set this "I Am the Light of the World" saying up.

III. The Lead into Jesus Being the Light

The phrase just seems to just pop up and come out of nowhere. Jesus has just forgiven an adulterous woman thrown before him to challenge him and to try to trap him because the religious leaders are looking for a way to have Jesus killed. He has really stirred the people up with his teachings and healings. They were looking for a way to accuse him.

They throw the woman to the ground and state the law says we should stone her to death – hey where's the guy who is part of this?

Jesus does not give an immediate answer but bends down and writes on the ground with his finger. Then he says, "If anyone of you is without sin, then go ahead and cast the first stone in" and he stoops back down.

And one at a time, they all left. Do you know who left first? The older ones (vs 9).

Jesus stands the woman up and asks her, "Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?" "No one sir." "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."

You see friends, living the Christian life is not just about being saved from your sin, it is about being free from a life of sin. Go and sin no more. Go..., and sin no more.

IV. The Tie In from a Visit from a Jewish Religious Leader

Do you remember a guy named Nicodemus? Did he come to Jesus in light or darkness? It was the cover of night. He didn't want to be seen with Jesus. Jesus ends his conversation with Nicodemus that night by saying, "For God so loved the world..." He tells him, "The verdict is this: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness more than light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light..., whoever comes into the truth comes into the light."

How about you? Are you hungry? Do you want to live in the light?

The verdict is this. It is almost like Jesus is saying judge for yourself Nicodemus. The Son of Man did not come into the world to condemn the world, but to save it. (vs 17) Jesus truly came to save the world. He also came to save each one of us. He came to save you but not just from your sin, but so you can go and sin no more. We call that holy living, sanctification – it is about growing to be more like Jesus and letting his light fill your life to chase away evil and darkness and so you can let your light shine for him.

Come on – This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine...!

V. Do Not Hide Your Light Under a Bowl

Jesus early on in his ministry preaching by the sea of Galilee, my son Josh and our Bishop were there on Wed. morning as the sun came up, said to those gathered there, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. He says we are not to light a lamp and put it under a bowl or bushel. We are to sit it on a stand so it gives light to everyone in the house, "so let your light shine before all people," including your next door neighbors. Why? "So they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Mt 5:14-16)

I don't know about you, but I tend to stumble around a lot when it's dark in the house. I remember waking up one night, grabbing my pillow and heading down the steps to the couch. It was pitch black and I missed a step and my bottom went boom, boom, boom and it hurt. Know what I did before the week was out? Went and bought two night lights so that wouldn't happen again. The light helps me see where I am going.

God's Word is like that as well. The Psalmist says, "Thy word is a Lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." (Ps 119:105) Reading God's Word and applying it helps us in our spiritual journey, not just being saved from sin, but to go and sin no more. God's word sheds light on many of our questions, our struggles, our challenges, our relationships. But you'll just be living in the dark if you don't pick it up and read it. If you have not started the Bishop's Bible Challenge, start today.

VI. A Story of Light Shining from Stephen Ministry

Let me share how one of your past members who now attends VA Beach UMC experienced this. Debbie Emerson in sharing about Stephen Ministries says.

"Stephen Ministry was a blessing for me. Pastor Randy suggested it to me as I was searching for my gift. I was not a candidate for choir, just ask my dogs. I had lost my Mom, Ann Bodkin, and was still in a sad place. I went through the first class of Stephen Ministry training with some truly amazing folks that I call my friends. I never thought about how much it would help me. When we were commissioned, I felt the Spirit move in me. And even as I was a SM, I could feel it touching my soul. When I prayed with and for my Care Receiver, I was also being blessed."

"I use my training every day and never more so than when my Daniel was sick and then passed away. I feel my SM gifts were a help and a blessing to us both. I am also thankful and blessed to have had a wonderful SM for my own grief journey. She was an angel for me."

"We all have or had or will have a time in our lives where we need to have reinforcements for our faith journeys. SM gave me some life skills to help me but also to help me help others."

"I know God had Stephen Ministry planned for me. It is a part of who I am and why I am."

Today Debbie has been referred by us to be part of Stephen Ministry at VA Beach UMC. The light of Christ that has filled her life is a light that shines forth to touch the hearts of lives of those God puts in Debbie's path each day.

VII. The Proverbial Light at the End of the Tunnel

Have you ever heard the phrase, "There's a light at the end of the tunnel?" At least we hope there is a light at the end of the tunnel. We can find ourselves in some deep, dark places in life, and we are not really sure we'll ever "see the light" again. Sometimes we wonder if we can go on at all. It is so hard to even get up and put one foot in front of the other. Here is what I've learned. When we learn to trust God as a source of light, God will often only give you direction one step at a time. Think about it, with the most powerful flood light, how far does it shine before you can't really see where you are going anymore? We can see specs of light. When you are up in an airplane, you can see street lights pretty clearly outlining roads, subdivisions, and lights that light up ball fields. The flood lights in our yards can be a nuisance to our neighbors, but by the time I get out of our yard that light does not offer much guidance. A flash light only projects a few yards in front of us.

VIII. Is Life a Destination or a Journey?

Here is the thing. Do you see life as a destination or more as a journey? If you see it as a journey, you'll get less frustrated. And who determines your steps? You or God? Psalm 37:23-24 reminds us, "The steps of a good person are ordered by God and God makes his/her steps firm." Get this next verse. "Though he stumbles, he will not fall for the Lord upholds him with his hand."

How hard is it for you to trust God a step at a time? On a scale from 1 being really hard, to 10 being easy, 5 sometimes, what would you say? It depends on how much we want to be in control, right? How many steps did it take the Israelites in the wilderness to reach the Promise Land? A lot.

Pastor Rob Faquay gave me something to think about. If we see life as a journey, we will see a difference between what he calls "stopping places" verses "staying places." For Christians, we are to see life as a pilgrimage. We are headed somewhere, but arrival is a myth. Oh it's when we think we've arrived is when we get stale, life becomes like a deep rut, our dreams fade away, we get unsatisfied, grumpy, complaining.

Knowing that our "there" is beyond some destination of this world is actually freeing. So that in this life, if you find yourself in some unwanted place, you can know that place is not your final destination. It's a "stopping point." Are we not thankful that many places in life are stopping points and not staying places!

The truth is we are all just passing through. It's not about denying life's challenges, it's about knowing you and I do not have to hang out in those dark places forever. And when we are there, where is God?

Jesus is the light of the world. When his light is allowed to shine in on our circumstances, our griefs, our failures, our illnesses, our relationship breakdowns, it does tend to expose us. That may sound scary at first, but it is actually very freeing if we will be open to God's light shining in. The light is what exposes what needs changing so we can come to places of new understanding, new behaviors, new responses, healing and deeper faith. Are you hungry for God? Do you want to truly live in the light of Jesus Christ?

IX. Turn Off the Dark

I've been reading a book called, "Through the Eyes of a Lion" recommended to me by Drew and Betty Jo Wynham at the time Mookie his brother passed. It's about a Pastor and family whose 5 year old daughter died suddenly on Christmas Eve and 5 years later he wrote the story of that horrible dark place. He called it the Christmas from Hell. We had the Labor Day Weekend from Hell when Kelsey was killed. How Levi Luslo got up and preached 7 services Christmas Eve, only God knows. I can tell you this, he needed God more than he needed courage from God. "Sorrow upon sorrow," the waves crashed and threatened to undo him and his family. His sermon, that he had been thinking about for months was called, "Turn off the Dark." He says: "Hurting with hope still hurts."

The scripture that Christmas Eve? II Timothy 1:10. "Jesus has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." Jesus turned off the dark.

Jesus brought life and immortality to light and Pastor Levi's perspective changed. Through the eyes of Lenya, whose hair reminded them of a lion's mane, he began to look at life as a journey, not a destination. And Jesus abolished death – no more darkness.

It is also part of us knowing the rest of the story. In Rev. 21:23, it says, "The city of God does not need the sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamp is its Light." Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." So even in your darkest places, know those places are not intended to be "staying places" but "stopping places."

X. Stopping Places Verses Staying Places

Remember the day Jesus said, "He who is without sin, cast the first stone?" Jesus, being the light, exposed the sin of those holding the stones. They recognized what he said to be truth and that shed light on the entire situation, not just the woman's sin. The light exposed the truth of sin in each of their lives, they dropped their stones and walked away. One wonders if Nicodemus was ready?

In a moment we will be sharing together in Holy Communion. If you think you are currently living in a "staying place," think again as the light of God's love shines into your situation. See it as a "stopping place." For even if it feels dark right now, God's light can direct your steps to new places of change and transformation.

Sometimes we end up in dark places, not of our own doing or choosing. Sometimes we end up there because of our poor choices. Sinning is still a real possibility. We have not been abandoned. We are not beyond grace. Christ came not to condemn us but to spare us and give us the ability through the Spirit to go and sin no more. Come and experience darkness being turned into light. Are you hungry? Do you want to live in the light of Christ? Let's turn off the dark and let the light Jesus is shine through us.

XI. Closing Prayer

Let Us Pray:

Holy God, fill us with your light. Shine your light into every situation and encounter we have. May others see you more clearly because of seeing your light in our lives. We prepare to come to your table, in the name of Jesus who is our Eternal Ligh. Amen