

March 6, 2011

John 8:12-20

“I am the Light of the World”

Children’s message idea (from narrative lectionary podcast): Baptismal candles – usually give boxes w/them and they become a memento; faith is not a memento to keep for ourselves, but to show to the world.

Instead, give a candle holder for baptismal candles so that we can burn the candles as a reminder to be the light of Jesus for the world.

Tell a story of the feeling of being in the darkness:

My mom grew up in a house where the light switch was at the top of the stairs; her sisters and brother would dare each other to be the one to go up the stairs, in the dark, to turn it on.

Tent camping as a child w/many of my aunts, uncles and cousins; walking from the tent to the bathroom at night; Uncle Paul jumping out of the dark and scaring his sisters and wife; back at our tent, all we heard was horrible screaming coming from the dark.

You most likely have a few good stories about scaring yourself in the dark as well.

Fear of darkness

Not only the physical darkness creates fear, but fear itself can create darkness in our lives.

Fear that fills your imagination when you’re up waiting for a teenager to come home.

Fear about what you will do after the loss of a loved one or a bad health diagnosis.

Fear of making the right job decision for yourself or your family.

Or the fear that simply keeps you up at night.

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’” (John 8:12)

Can you hear the significance of Jesus saying, “I am the light of the world”?

Last week we learned the importance of Jesus saying, “It is I (I am); do not be afraid.”

Jesus connects w/God through “I am” statements and his message of “have no fear” continues here.

Here’s the set-up of what Jesus is doing – Jesus is at the Temple in chapter 7 and finds himself still at the temple, teaching. It is during the festival called The Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles)

Feast of booths/tabernacles (John 7 & 8)

It’s a fall festival; very important; (lasts a week); 1/3 that require travel to the holy city
Commemorates the 40 years Israel wandered in the desert during the time of Moses
People built booths roofed w/leafy branches in courtyards and alleyways to eat and sleep in during the festival, recalling how God made Israel dwell in simple shelters when he brought them out of land of Egypt (Lev. 23:42-43)

Memory of past and hope for the future

(Psalm 134:1-2 – “Come bless the Lord; all you servants of the Lord. . .”)

Celebrate at night by lighting torches throughout the city

4 golden candlesticks set up in the temple. Atop each, a golden bowl filled with oil w/wicks made from priests' garments floating so that light would shine brightly through the city
1 time of year people physically in presence of on-going light
Priests watch rising of the sun and then turn towards the temple/God to recognize the true light

It is in the midst of this festival of lights that Jesus utters the words, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

Do you hear how powerful his claim is? A claim that he makes for the people and for you, for he is the true light, and in him there is no darkness at all.

Light is an important theme in the Gospel of John

Light – 16 times in John in 5 clusters; Finding something, something revealed

Important theme throughout scripture, such as in Psalms:

Psalm 27:1 – "The Lord is my light and my salvation"; Psalm 60:19-20 – "The Lord will be your everlasting light"; Psalm 2:5 – "Walk in the light of the Lord"

In John, walking in darkness = persistent unbelief and walking in light = living by faith in Jesus Christ

Do you know that the light of Christ is more powerful than any imagined or real fear that holds you? For the light of Christ surrounds you and glimpses of Christ's light are in the world! Have you seen it? If not, maybe someone else can share with you where Christ's light is b/c sometimes we need the support of our community of faith to pull us out of the darkness of our fears.

Do you know the feeling, when you come out of dark movie theater into the light? – squint and hard to see

Leave a bright day and go into a dark room? – squint and can't see until eyes adjust
Eventually eyes become accustomed to the dark or to the light and you can see, but you can't see in both and can't switch back and forth with perfect vision

Jesus offers us to be accustomed to the light of life, a light that draws on his strength, and not our own, to carry us through our darkest moments. It doesn't completely take away the darkness, but it does allow us to see through it (to squint), knowing that the darkness will not overcome us and that the light of Christ has the final word.

For Christ's light brings true belief in faith and it is a light that continues even beyond death.

Helpful Resources: Narrative lectionary podcast; WestonWilliams.com; *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, Craig R. Koester