

March 22, 2020 Portraits Pt. 2 “Jesus: The Light That Reveals”

Good day! And it is a good day in spite of what is happening in the world around us. I thank you for taking the time to join with us in reading this message. My prayer for each one of you is that you will have the strength to remain cocooned in your homes as much as possible. One of the lessons of history...the Black Plague killed thousands. One of the things that facilitated the spread of plagues in medieval times, was that people fled from the cities where the lethal illness was claiming lives. As a result of travel, they took it across their nations and throughout much of Europe. “Those who ignore the lessons of history are bound to repeat mistakes that have been made.” When our Prime Minister asked Canadians to remain at home as much as possible, I suspended services at St. Andrew’s in Stirling. The goal was to do a Christian thing: to obey those in authority over us. I also wanted to prevent movement among you and to encourage you to remain at home. Barbara and I are well and like so many others coping with the isolation. May God bless you and keep you safe, as you attempt to do the same.

During Lent 2020, I have been sharing this series of portraits of Jesus. In the first of the series we looked at Jesus the life changer. I read the story of the call of the first disciples. Simon Peter, James and John and Andrew were partners in a fishing business. When Jesus asked Peter to take the boat out, Peter was skeptical and informed Jesus that he had worked all night and caught nothing. Peter relented and did as Jesus asked. A miracle happened. So many fish were caught in the

nets the nets began to tear. They filled two boats with the catch, and Peter realized his life had changed. He begged Jesus to leave him because he was a sinful man. Jesus said to Peter and his partners “follow me and fish for men.” Luke testifies they left everything, their boats, their gear, a fortune in fish, and followed Jesus. Our Lord still changes lives. HE still asks us to follow HIM. (Luke 5:1-11)

The second portrait was of Jesus, the man with authority. A Roman officer, a centurion, asked his Jewish friends to go to Jesus and ask HIM to come and heal a sick servant. The servant was “dear to the centurion.” He was probably an older man, and he and the centurion had been through the wars together: a servant/slave who has become a very special friend. The centurion had earned “Jewish friends.” They were elders of the local synagogue in Capernaum. They told Jesus the centurion deserved HIS help. “He loves our nation and built our synagogue,” they said. What this reveals is that the centurion, a Gentile (not Jewish), has become involved to an extraordinary degree with the local congregation. The New Testament refers to such Gentiles as “God fearing men.” Jesus agreed to go to the officer’s house and a crowd followed him to see what would happen. When they were a few doors away a second delegation of friends approaches Jesus and addresses HIM. In an extraordinary gesture of cross cultural sensitivity, the centurion has sent this message: “I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. I too am a man under authority, I give orders and they are obeyed. Just say the word...and my servant will be well.” Jesus turned to the crowd

and said, "I have not seen faith like this in all of Israel." Some of the delegation ran back to the house and they reported, that the servant had been healed. The miracle is about authority. There is nothing that Jesus cannot do. Remember the song: It is no secret what God can do, What HE's done for others HE'll do for you." (Luke 7:1-10)

Today we turn to a third portrait of Jesus. HE is the light that reveals. In Luke chapter 8, beginning at verse 16 Jesus told a parable. A parable is a short story. And for the most part it teaches one lesson. Jesus said what amount to, "No one in their right mind would enter a dark room, turn on the lamp and then cover it so the light did not shine. No," Jesus said, "Instead the home owner will set it on a table so that everyone can benefit from the light and see where they are and are going." Jesus was talking about Himself. John tells us in his Gospel that Jesus is the light of the world. (John 1:4) This is what the parable in Luke 8 is about. The light of the world reveals things, makes it possible for us to see, makes visible things that we would normally not see, things we would miss, like the real presence of God as HE touches our own lives.

We are living in a terrible and trying moment. I for one, never expected to see a modern version of an ancient plague literally bring the whole of my country, let alone the world, to its knees. But that is what we are witnessing. A pandemic is a world wide plague. It has closed my favourite coffee shop. It has disbanded my daily coffee group. It has closed my church building and I miss my congregation and

fellowship with them. But it has also shut down much of Canada. And it has caused world wide travel (something we took for granted a mere week ago) it has shut travel down. Several hundred thousand are reportedly sick around the world. And thousands have died.

And yet the reality is we are not alone and we are not lost. We may have a new grasp of what darkness can do...but we can still access the light and find our way. As I wash my hands for the 10th time in a day, I sing, "Jesus loves me, this I know/ For the Bible tells me so/ Little ones to Him belong/ They are weak but HE is strong/ Yes Jesus loves me." And then I put some cream on my hands to moisturize my drying skin! We are not alone in this trying experience. Jesus is the light, and HE reveals the love of God to anyone who wants to see it. Like a lamp in a darkened space HE dispels the darkness. HE makes it possible for a weak man like me to overcome my fears. In the past 5 years I have had at least 3 times where my life was threatened by illness. This current plague makes a 4th time. No I am not sick at the moment, but only a fool would think the virus is more than an experience away. And in this moment of darkness as in numerous others, Jesus shows us the way.

I have heard the miracle stories that are part of the steady stream of news programmes and briefings by our Premier of Ontario and our Prime Minister Trudeau. If you do not think it a miracle that Liquor companies are dedicating workers time and materials to bottle hand sanitizer you have failed to see a flash of light in the midst of this current

darkness. Premier Ford said he did not care if they put it out in whisky bottles so long as it was labelled hand sanitizer. Something to thank God for! Perhaps even more importantly something to see the grace of God in, in a moment when there is a lot of darkness. Jesus is the light that reveals. It is clear that a heart was touched such that the liquor industry dedicated workers, and materials, time and profits, to producing something people need to sanitize their hands. And then there is the story of the auto parts companies who are retooling to manufacture ventilators to save lives and treat critically ill people in hospitals in our province. Acts of mercy are going to become part of the daily fare of these times as well as bad news and darkness. Use your ears and open your eyes. See deeds that reflect the light of God, deeds of mercy, deeds of kindness, deeds that show a desire to care for others. There is light in the midst of our current circumstances. For those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, they are more than just human stories. They reveal that Jesus has touched people, changed values, and altered culture such that we care for others and one another to a mind boggling degree. Praise God. Light held high. Light that reveals that God is present and that God cares.

Jesus said there is nothing that has been hidden that will not be disclosed. (verse 17). When a vaccine for this virus has been produced it will be tempting to thank the researchers who create that vaccine and let the story end there. For God's sake do not make that mistake. Praise God for research and learning that leads to medicines that save lives

and make Canada and the world as a whole a safer place. This portion in Luke 8 is about the Kingdom of God, a fellowship of faith with counter-culture values and views. I will say thanks to the researchers to be sure, but I will also say thank you to the God who sent HIS Son into the world to save it. To save it from sin. Amen. To save it from disease. Amen. To save it by the means of inspired workers and researchers who do things that make the darkness appear to be controlled, in spite of our careless ways.

Thank you for taking the time to read this message. Easter is fast approaching. I know that my church family and I will in all probability, not be spending this Easter in the sanctuary on Mill Street in Stirling. We will probably not be sharing the experience at all. Earlier in this week I picked up my white shirts at the Dry Cleaner's before the closures began. The lady behind the counter was saying she was going to miss spending Easter in her Church. So we wished one another a Happy Easter and promised to each say a prayer for the other. May God be with you in the trying moments of the time ahead of us. Each week there will be a message here, through Lent and on while the contagion demands we not meet publicly. Remember that Jesus is the light that reveals. Walk in the light of God and the power of the Spirit. Keep the faith.

Let us pray;

Lord when we are afraid, touch us with the light of your grace. When we mourn the passing of those who succumb to this viral illness, remind us of the hope of eternal

life. When we want to be in a crowd of friends celebrating the end of this time when we must be careful, give us the strength that we will need to continue practicing social isolation. Lead us. Guide us. Watch over us. This we ask in the name of Jesus who is the light that reveals the real nature of your everlasting love. Amen