

TITLE: I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

TEXT: JOHN 8:12-19

SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 9:2-7

I – LIGHTHOUSES:

As I prepared for this message I was searching the web for pictures of lighthouses. I sometimes do this as it helps motivate my inspirational juices. And that's what I was trying to do as I contemplated the symbolism for this morning's service as we continue on our quest to answer Jesus' question of "WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?" As I did this I came across this one particular picture that struck a chord and did start the juices flowing in my brain. It didn't take me long to realize that our Christianity could be seen in this one piece of art.

As I looked at it I saw a majestic tower standing tall and I could see the windows at the top where the light would shine out for all to see. Rocks surround the tower...rock upon rock upon rock. Now we all know what the lighthouse is there for, we all know why lighthouses were built on our shores all over the world. They were built because our shores are lined with rocks and other hazards, and many a boat crashed in the darkness and many lives were lost over the years. These lighthouses shined a light out into the darkness to guide the ships past the rocks – the hazards, to illuminate their way, so that lives were saved and not lost.

But that's not what drew my attention to this little piece of art. As I looked at it I noticed a rickety old wooden pier off to the side and tied up at the end of that pier is a small one-man boat. At that moment that lighthouse scene became personal. I realized that not only was the beam of light shining out into the darkness meant for large ships carrying hundreds of people. That same light was meant for that one life in that one little boat. It too was significant. It was as I thought about that little one-man boat that My Faith was deepened and I understood something more about Jesus. Let me explain.

II – JESUS IS SUCH A LIGHT:

In art and literature Jesus has been compared to the light of a lighthouse, and I can see the comparison clearly. Jesus is referred to as the light in many passages. You heard the words of Isaiah this morning where he prophesized about the coming Messiah and said, "The people who walk in darkness will see a great light—a light that will shine on all who live in the land where death casts its shadow." If you read the

beginning of the Gospel of John you see that his birth story doesn't tell us about mangers and shepherds or angels and kings. He tells us about the birth of Jesus this way, ¹"In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and he was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³He created everything there is. Nothing exists that he didn't make. ⁴Life itself was in him, and this life gives light to everyone. ⁵The light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it." Jesus is the light, we can't argue that can we? We proclaimed this on Christmas Eve two years ago.

Our faith deepens when we realize what boat we're in. When we think about this image of Jesus being the lighthouse and standing amid the rocks of life to guide us to safety, we get the image that we are on this large cruise ship. We get the image that hundreds of people, just like ourselves are on the boat and heading for the rocks but that it's up to the captain to steer the ship to look at the light and steer the ship to safety and save all of us from death and destruction. I wish it were that simple, that I could be your captain and steer you safely into the port of heaven.

The truth is we are all in these little one-person boats. You are your own captain. You must steer your own boat into safety. You must set your eyes on the light of Jesus and follow the course yourself. The light is a personal beacon. It shines for all, but each and every one of us must decide to follow it to safety or veer off course and crash against the rocks.

III – TEXT:

We can see this lesson in our second Lenten "I AM" passage from John.

John 8:12 - 19 (NLT)

¹²Jesus said to the people, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't be stumbling through the darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."

¹³The Pharisees replied, "You are making false claims about yourself!"

¹⁴Jesus told them, "These claims are valid even though I make them about myself. For I know where I came from and where I am going, but you don't know this about me. ¹⁵You judge me with all your human limitations, but I am not judging anyone. ¹⁶And if I did, my judgment would be correct in every respect because I am not alone—I have with me the Father who sent me. ¹⁷Your own law says that if two people agree about something, their witness is accepted as fact. ¹⁸I am one witness, and my Father who sent me is the other."

¹⁹"Where is your father?" they asked.

Jesus answered, "Since you don't know who I am, you don't know who my Father is. If you knew me, then you would know my Father, too."

This passage follows the one where the religious leaders have drug a woman caught in adultery before Jesus to see if he will go against the law of Moses which said she should be stoned to death, because if he had they could have called for him to be stoned to death. But Jesus didn't get dashed against the rocks he put the hazards back in their path when he said you're right, go ahead and stone her to death but...let the ones of you who are sinless yourself throw the first rocks. The woman lived and Jesus showed her the beacon of light when he told her to go and sin no more.

He then turns to the crowd and tells them he is the light of the world, that if they fix their eyes on him and follow his light it will lead them to eternal life. His light will guide them through the rocks of life and straight to their God. You'll note that Jesus says this to all of them. He doesn't exclude anyone. He made the statement to the religious leaders, the tax collectors, the thieves, and the women who engaged in the oldest profession, the fishermen, and all the common folk who were gathered around him. It didn't matter who they were or what they had done, each were invited to the light. It doesn't say but I'm guessing there were those that day that got the message and started using him to navigate by.

But we see the Pharisee's decided to wash up upon the rocks of law instead of following the light. The beacon was right in front of them and instead of being drawn to it they started spouting their law that Jesus couldn't make such claims without two witnesses. They think they have the path to righteousness and a place at God's feet in heaven, but Jesus tells them the only way to find God is to follow the light of the Son whom God sent to guide them. We know that they never did follow the light, but crashed upon the rocks of death by their own choice. They piloted their own boats into the darkness instead of into the light.

IV – WHAT COURSE ARE YOU ON?:

There is a story about a newly commissioned Navy captain who took great pride in his first assignment to be in command of a battleship. One stormy night the captain saw a light moving steadily in their direction. He ordered the signalman to send the following message: "Change your course ten degrees to the south." The reply came back: "Change your course ten degrees to the north." The captain was determined not to give way to another vessel, and so he sent a counter message. "Alter your direction ten degrees. I am the captain of a United States Naval ship." The answer flashed back promptly: "Alter your direction. I am the lighthouse."

There are times when we all have to identify with that naval captain aren't there?

Times when we allow our stubborn pride and American will to set us on a collision course. Our battle cry is “I have my rights” or “I’ll do it my way.” We don’t consult any map or follow any beacon except our own desires and wills. Then we charge ahead with a “darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead” attitude and get dashed against the rocks. It doesn’t have to be that way! There is a beacon to set our eyes upon and lead us to shore safely. There is Jesus, the “Light of the World.”

My question for you this morning is, “WHO’S COURSE ARE YOU ON?” As you travel through life and get buffeted by the gale force winds and the large waves, where do you look to for guidance? As you travel the seas of life and face the rocks of worry, illness, stress, depression, self-pity, insecurity, and temptation, where do you fix your eyes to gain safe passage? We have a guiding light that will help us navigate through the reefs, rocks, and rough seas of life if we seek and follow the light. That light stands ready to help us complete this voyage we call life safely. Do you let Jesus tell you how to alter your course? The Bible doesn’t promise us a rock free path, but does promise a navigator to get us around the rocks.

V – YOU’RE LITTLE BOAT:

I knew long ago that one of the answers to our Lenten question was that Jesus was the “Light of the World.” But this little piece of art pointed out to me how personal that light is and how brightly it shines. My faith took another step when I looked at this little boat and realized such a vessel would have absolutely no chance of surviving any kind of a storm and on the open seas it would surely capsize and it’s passenger would surely drown and die. Yet here it is tied up at the pier, which leads to the lighthouse. It’s this image solidified in my mind that I am an unworthy vessel on the sea of life and the only hope I have to make it to the dock safely is to follow the light attached to the dock. God sent his Son to be the light of the entire world, but we make it to heaven...one boat at a time. Jesus makes it personal.

Who is Jesus...he’s the light that keeps my head above water in this life, and above the clouds in the next.

AMEN