

Light seems to be the most central aspect of our existence, even that of the universe. Now, I know some physicists might take exception to that thought, given what we know about dark matter, but let's not let that weigh us down too much at this part. In both the gospel of *John* and the *Psalms*, the idea of light is central. First, there is the miracle of sight that Jesus grants the blind man and the delight it gives the man; second is the Pharisees who purposefully refuse to see the light; last, we have the Psalmist delighting in his lord because the Lord is his *light* and thus his salvation. Think of how we use the term today. Faces *light* up with happiness, reformers shine a *light* on corruption, we *light* our way when uncertain, and we even “skip the *light* fandango” (which, by the way is a lively Spanish dance, or, if you of my generation, a key line from the song “A Whiter Shade of Pale” by Proco Harum). Even when we are critical of someone who is dour and sour we tell them to *lighten* up.

The scriptures are clear. God is our light, our illumination upon a world often weird and dark, but God is also such a powerful light that we often can't gaze directly upon Her. Instead, we need to look at her light reflected: reflected in the world around us, the art made by Her children, and the light that shines from all our brothers and sisters.

This semester I'm teaching a college course that promotes nonfiction writing skills, using a workshop approach. I have definitely lucked out. One of the major assignments requires each student to produce a reflective essay, a narrative that tells a story of an experience that has shaped their lives. I've been amazed. A couple of my students are a few years older than their peers, and when they tell their stories, the amount of living, joy and trauma squeezed into those years is amazing. Sarah, for example, who went to the West Coast before returning to settle down in Des Moines and start college. She hiked and biked up and down the southern California and Western Oregon area. She met movie stars and thieves, saints and crazy roommates. She had adventures and misadventures in about equal number, but both were enlightening. After I'd written most of this sermon, I sent Sarah an email and asked if she identifies with any faith. Sarah responded “I would consider myself a disciple of Christ. As we see in Acts 11:26, a disciple is a Christian and vice versa.” I'm a bit confused by the “vice versa” part of her response, but in reading the rest of that scripture, it is apparent that a Christian becomes a Christian where they declare themselves to be—nothing more, nothing less.

So this is what makes a Christian special. It is not their worship of God by itself, but their acknowledgement of God's role—God's light—in their life. That way, we can consciously seek Her guidance. I see Sarah as someone well along on that path and likely to seek God's light in a more conscious, systematic way. And this is my bias

speaking perhaps: anyone who longs for both adventure and nature is more than halfway there in her journey to a conscious and grounded spirituality.

But back to the scriptures. These Pharisees are god-seeking men, I believe, just ones afraid of the light. They had a vested interest in an orthodox reading the Hebrew scriptures, for example the observance of the Sabbath. But they didn't look into the idea of the light one draws from the Sabbath. It was a ritual, a law-heavy ritual, not a means of lightening humans' load. Christ knew that God's work need be done, even as some of the more extreme groups of Christians know that the cows still need be milked and the chicken fed. We modern folks of the Judean Christian tradition could learn something here, or, better said, relearn it. If we would put aside our obsession with productivity and treat the Sabbath as a day to devote to God's light brightening our time of leisure and in company with our folks, we'd not only be better followers of God, but happier humans. We often view various "orthodox" Jews as a little strange, maybe even backward; same with some strains of Christianity—the Seventh Day Adventists and Amish come to mind. Why Saturday or Sunday? That's part of another sermon. We use the cliché "take the time to smell the roses." Let's bend that a little, and know that it takes conscious energy and time to truly see the light.

Interestingly, a lot about the Amish remind me of Crossroads. They don't own buildings reserved for worship; instead they worship of the homes of their peers, and will sometimes even visit other denominations if they want a more formal church service. They are family, and they are of the family of man. They give disproportionately to charity and support of their less fortunate peers. The same sort of bonding together is also true of the Mennonites. And like our congregation, a large number of Mennonite groups fully respect same-sex marriage. We can call that enlightened, but I call it something even more inclusive—just being Christian. After all, what would Jesus do if a same-sex couple asked for His blessing? I can't imagine the Lord of compassion doing anything but bless them.

But light can be dangerous, if we don't know how you handle it. I think of the fame brought on to Jason Oglesbee, if you remember him. To quote the *Des Moines Register*, "Even if you don't know Oglesbee's name, you might know his face and physique. He was the burly construction worker dangling from a crane in downtown Des Moines who on June 30, 2009, plucked Patti Ralph-Neely from the churning waters of the Des Moines River. From the riverbank, *Des Moines Register* photographer Mary Chind snapped a dramatic photo of the rescue that won a 2010 Pulitzer Prize. Oglesbee was on a construction crew, helping build a pedestrian

bridge when he swooped in to save a stranger's life while risking his own. One slip and he might have been swallowed in the same waters. 'He picked me up like I was a little sack of flour,' Ralph-Neely said."

"So calls for interviews and television appearances pounded down on him. Ralph-Neely, 75, still considers Oglesbee to be her angel. Her husband, Alan, drowned in the same emergency after the couple's boat plunged over the Center Street Dam. 'I'm no hero,' the construction worker protested to Ralph-Neely's daughter at the time. 'Someone died today.' Oglesbee refused interviews from national network TV news programs, among other offers of publicity. 'He felt so bad he didn't get to save her husband,'" said Oglesbee's mom. It was hard for him to accept the praise that he got, the good words that he got." On April 17 of 2017, he died at the age of 53. He had a checkered past: drug use, even prison time. Some folks believe his premature death might be related to a drug overdose, some even suggest suicide. Nothing official has been said. What does this have to do with light?

I think the light of the world was *oppressive* to him, that it amplified his guilt over not saving *both* boaters, that being a TV celebrity would do the opposite than lighten his load. My point: Oglesbee needed the light of God to help him see the good he **had** done, to see he was a child of the Creator, and that in itself is richness enough to go on with life. God knows he was a good man, even when he was not being dramatically heroic. A childhood friend of his became addicted to meth and went into rehab. Of all her friends, he was the one who visited her and he also took great pains that her two children were taken care of in her absence. I can't help but think that some spiritual contemplation, especially with the wise guidance of a clergyperson like we have. I don't want to get all theological about this, but a longstanding issue in the Christian community is this: good works do not suffice to join the kingdom of God. We also need relationship with our Creator to see the light that shines on and from our lives. Jason was not lucky enough to get that.

And here is another take on the idea of light. The light from our sun is colorless until it is *interrupted*. Rainbows are a great example. "A **rainbow** is a meteorological phenomenon that is caused by reflection, refraction and dispersion of light in water droplets resulting in a spectrum of light appearing in the sky," the wisdom of the world wide web tells us. Furthermore, "**Rainbows** caused by sunlight always appear in the section of sky directly opposite the sun." Now if that is not clear evidence that God is have a ball lighting up Her creation, I don't know what is.

Every color we see on this gorgeous planet—ignoring screen time—is an example of light being caught and being bounced back at our eyeballs. We see white, and the entire spectrum is ours to behold, we see yellow, and that’s one of the primary colors on the spectrum, we see green and we’re seeing yellow and blue combined, we see purple which is red mixed in with blue, and on and on. And in insofar as we can see distinctions, and we being humans, have names for those distinctions, then we have a color. Interestingly, there are languages spoken widely that do not have a term to distinguish green from blue, and these folks do not make a distinction except on the relative value of the color. Thus, light can also be subjective.

My point, other than to impress you with my googling, is that God’s light looks different depending upon how it’s used. Some of us may reflect God’s light in such a way that it shimmers in iridescence and the world is attracted to our works. Others of us are specialists: red for those who inspire passion, pink to inspire tenderness, green to represent fecundity. Most of us are largely brown, and that’s not bad. Brown is most often the color of fertile soil; and people like Ron, who is as green as they get, would produce nothing without that God-given dirt.

I also think of the first light and the last light of our days. If you are awake at the very beginnings of dawn (which I am entirely too often) I bet you still delight in those opening first rays. Old guy that I am, I still see the promise of a new day alight with possibilities for productive work, for gentle play, for times with friends and loved ones. If that anticipation is not God-given, I don’t know what is. Likewise, as the sun sets, especially in the summer, the last of the light lingers on and on as if longing never to leave. It is the promise of hope, hope for another new day just around the corner—perhaps, if you are so inclined, a promise of life again beyond the darkness of death. I can’t believe that there isn’t something beyond just physics in the brightness of God’s sun on this blue planet. And we haven’t even talked about the shimmering mirages of liquid that appear before in the distance on black asphalt as we ride in a car or pedal a bike on a clear July day.

So, it is clear that the world is full of God’s light, whether we’re here or not, so what’s the point of being Christian. I believe it is to consciously and selectively reflect that light so the world is a more beautiful, warmer place for our fellow planeters. As the cliché goes, in act, word and deed, let us show the glory of God. In our lives, let us be prisms; in our passing, let there be a rainbow.

Benediction: Let the light of God shine upon you and from you. May Christ’s face smile graciously upon you and give you peace.