

Epiphany 5 Year A 2020  
St. Paul's Episcopal Church  
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Light, especially this time of year in the Church, is a regularly occurring symbol. For instance, Jesus uses light as a metaphor a lot, to Jesus the light that is in us is directly related to our relationship with God; the darkness that is in the world comes about when we ignore that light in ourselves and other. But Today Jesus says to us that we are the light of the world.

Well I thought about this from a numbers perspective. He's talking to a relatively small group of people and he's ministering at a time when the world's population was a fraction of what it is today. The question that came to mind was whether or not that light has grown brighter over the centuries as the church grew and became an institution or if it's remained relatively stagnant, or gone through periods of growth and stagnation. As I was thinking about this I remembered something from history class in regards to the relation to economic growth and the accessibility to light.

Did you know that economic growth throughout history is directly related to cost of light? In Jesus' time a lamp to light a room with, the fuel to light it would cost about a days wages, but that's just for 10 minutes of light. A days wages for 10 minutes. We can get some deeper perspective on Jesus' metaphor of a lamp under a bushel basket right? Well anyway, over the centuries things don't change much as far as light is concerned. People and cultures come up with varying instruments that burn a little longer like in Scotland they used to use the carcass of a storm petrel; it was very oily bird and they would run a wick down its throat and light it, place it on the table, but you had to clean the bird and run the wick, and it was time consuming. Eventually people discover wales and their blubber as a means to create light and this is good because it gives more light and is cheaper, but of course it's bad for wales.

For much of human history we lived by the rising and setting of the sun, literally. This may sound romantic but it was awful, cities like Paris had curfews and laws on the books that required people to turn in their keys to a magistrate at night because they didn't want people committing crimes, you had to be confined to your house from sunset to sunrise. As a result Economic growth remains relatively stagnant until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But all of this changes with the discovery of kerosene in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Suddenly that same day's wages that got us 10 minutes of light, could now get us 5 hours. Then of course there was Edison and electricity and the rest they say, is history. Now we don't even think about it, light is at our fingertips, it's cheap, and we measure economic growth exponentially now, and a days wages today? Gets us roughly 20,000 hours of light; today we are soaked with light and we even have light pollution in and around urban centers; it's everywhere.<sup>1</sup>

And yet we still need to hear again and again from Jesus today, that we are the light of the world. Because even though we live in a world with light all around us, with economic growth on the rise, the world remains threatened by darkness. How does the light of Christ in the world today relate to the growth of God's kingdom here on earth?

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<sup>1</sup> Data taken from: <https://www.npr.org/2014/05/02/309040279/in-4-000-years-one-thing-hasnt-changed-it-takes-time-to-buy-light>

Here we have in our readings today Jesus telling us that we are the light of the world, and God also warning of the ways in which our light is held back from the world. But we also see in Isaiah the behavior that obscures that light.

In Isaiah today the prophet explains why the people have been receiving the cold shoulder from God. They understand themselves to be righteous, to be devout in prayer and worship, but God sees it differently, when they ask “Why do we fast and you do not see?” God responds by laying out an appropriate fast, to feed the hungry, bring the homeless into our own homes, to loose the bonds of injustice...then, and only then does God say our light shall break forth.

The Good News today, sisters and brothers is that Jesus is right. Is he ever wrong? The Good News is that Jesus is telling us the truth when he says we are the light of the world. That is true sisters and brothers, but there may be times in our lives that we hold back that light. There may be times that we, like the prophet Isaiah warns against today, that we trust in our own righteousness, coming to church every Sunday and worshiping faithfully here, but maybe not connecting our Sunday experience to the rest of our week

How do we bring this light into the world? It is light that's not powered by wale blubber, coal or wind or solar energy; it's light that shines through us as those who devote their lives to Jesus Christ. I've spoken about this before, but in a world where the Church is becoming less and less relevant, people are searching more and more for meaning. In a world where economic growth is at historical levels, housing is becoming too expensive, public education is declining, and giving to churches is down as well. What can the Church do?

Well I think the church needs to believe that it is in fact the light of the world. And I don't mean some obscure institution, I mean you, I mean me. We have to believe Jesus when he says we are the light of the world, because guess what? We are!

But too often that darkness that is in the world gets in our way. When faced with all the world throws at us we may feel less than we may feel unable or unqualified to address the needs of the world, we may be too afraid to fail. I have been too afraid to fail in my life at times, so afraid that I have not spoken up or acted for fear of making a mistake or getting it wrong. We tell ourselves and allow ourselves to believe that we are not enough, that we are not spiritual enough, smart enough, strong enough. But sisters and brothers this is not true.

Jesus says we are the light of the world. And if Jesus says it, well it's good enough for me. We are the light of the world and if we are going to grow and produce more light in this world, we must believe that and live as those who are the light in this world, those who live to grow the kingdom of God through the brightness of our light. We are the light of the world. Let us accept this truth about ourselves and let us bring others to know this truth as well. *Amen.*