

John 8.12
Psalm 27.1-4
19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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(A disclaimer: This sermon was written to be spoken, which does not always translate into correct grammatical form for a document written to be read.)

I Am the Light of the World

One of the joys of my life is my nephew, Quinn. And one of the many things I love doing with Quinn is reading together. Quinn is 3 years old and loves to hear stories read aloud and—as is typical of his age—loves to have the same stories read over and over again. There are some stories that we read together that he has completely memorized and now he can “read” them to me.

Some of you know that my computer at home and the computer at Quinn’s house are both equipped with web cameras. It has been great fun to talk in real time with video to see each other—it has been a wonderful way to communicate before Quinn had much vocabulary. We could show each other things and make faces and I could read stories to him.

Now when we iChat with the web cameras Quinn and I talk for a little bit and then he usually starts riding his tricycle or tossing a ball while his mother and I talk. But if I offer to read a story, he is almost immediately attentive and quiet, often laying his head down on the desk where the computer is or leaning back in that wonderful relaxed child way against his momma.

A good story is a wonderful thing to share.

Maybe you remember being read to as a child. Or perhaps your experience more recently has been reading to a child and the world you travel to together through the words and pictures of a book.

It’s not just children who like to hear stories. Lots of adults like to be read to or read a great story—I certainly do. You know it isn’t just kids who have been gobbling up the tales of Harry Potter or Narnia.

When we had an all church retreat and I read a children’s story as part of worship, I could feel everyone—from youngest to oldest—listening intently—in a way that is different from how you listen when I’m just talking. (Perhaps I should be reading you more stories!)

A good story is a wonderful thing to share.

The bible is full of stories—full of all kinds of stories—some exciting, some tragic, some mystifying, some courage-building.

Many times we don't think of the stories in the bible in the same way as we do about other stories we love to hear. Perhaps because the bible's stories are sometimes hard to understand or they use language that isn't familiar or—let's be honest—there aren't any pictures.

But the stories are so important and can be life-changing because they are the stories of what God is doing in the lives of people—people who, in many ways, are just like us. You know this summer we've given each of our high school graduates a new bible because we want them to read those stories and to discover their own story is written in those pages.

This fall we begin a new way of sharing the biblical stories with our 4 years olds through 5th graders. Their Sunday school experience will be using the curriculum method called "Godly Play."

Godly Play prepares children to worship in a congregation and on their own. Each class session follows the pattern of Sunday worship so children will have a deeper understanding of the liturgy. The children greet one another, sing, pray, listen to the biblical story, wonder and reflect on the story, and then respond to God in a variety of ways. The children also share together in the feast and leave with a blessing.

Godly Play is rooted in the Montessori tradition with storytelling as a key component. Children are invited not just to learn the stories of the bible with their heads but to enter into them with their whole lives.

The storyteller and the children wonder together about the stories they hear, many times with the wondering questions: I wonder which part of this story you like best?

I wonder which part of this story is the most important part?

I wonder where you are in this story, or what part of this story is about you?

The goal of Godly Play is to help children become more fully aware of the mystery of God's presence around them and in their lives.

This morning instead of a traditional exegetical sermon on John 8:12: I am the light of the world, I invite you to open yourself to the story in a new way. That we may become more fully aware of the mystery of God's presence around us and in our lives.

[The story below is an enacted story adapted from Godly Play resources. Reading it and not seeing it enacted will give you only part of the experience of the story.]

[place on communion table a large flat container lined with a white cloth and filled with sand; Christmas eve type candles in a small container; candle snuffer]

[stand behind communion table – beside one of the candles]

Once there was someone who said such amazing things and did such wonderful things that people began to follow him.

But they didn't know who he was.

So one day they simply had to ask him.

And he said, "I am...the Light." **[hold hands up to the side of the candle]**

Let's enjoy the light. **[stand peacefully and enjoy the light]**

People who love the Light can become one with the Light.

This is how your light became one with the Light. Watch.

[hold up a small candle and look at it. look at congregation and say:]

This is your light. **[light candle from Christ candle; place in sand; repeat]**

Look how the light is growing. It all came from the Light here. **[point]**

[keep lighting candles... "This is your light."]

Many have come to the Light to receive their light.

But the Light is not smaller. It is still the same...

I wonder how so much light could be given away and the Light still be the same?

I wonder how so much light can come from one Light?

Let's enjoy the light. **[silently enjoy the light]**

There comes a time when the Light is changed so it's not just in one place anymore.

It can be in many places at once. Watch. You see the light is right here in the flame? It is easy to see.

[point to the flame in one of the small candles]

Now I'm going to change the light so it is not just in one place anymore.

It can be in many places all at once. Watch.

[slowly lower snuffer over votive light, holding it over the wick a moment, then slowly raising it, say...]

See? The light is still spreading out. Just because you can't see it anymore doesn't mean that it is gone.

The Light is all around us and in us.

[Watch the smoke curl up into the air and fade into the whole room.]

Now I will change each of your lights so they can be in more than one place.**[change each light]**

[change the Light]

Even the Light was changed. The Light that was just in one place at one time is in all places at all times.

So the Light can be everywhere in this room and in other places.

The Light is all around us and in us.

[step back from table, stand silently for a moment, then slowly put all the materials away]