

We have been preparing (pic of lights) for the ‘lighting up’ event at the end of November. Knitting is being done, shops are being chosen and the blurb for the competition is being written. There is something nice about the lights on dark nights. That got us thinking and we decided that during November we would have a think about what the bible says about light.

“And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. And God saw that the light was good.” Of all the things the Lord God has made, light was the first. And not only the first, but the building block upon which all the rest of the creation depends. Light is the precursor to life itself. Genesis tell us as much – though, intuitively, we human beings seem to know this. Instinctively, we know that light is good – just as, instinctively, we fear the darkness.

Barbara Brown Taylor, a well-known preacher, teacher, and writer, lives in a rural part of north Georgia. Her seven-year-old niece Anna was visiting one summer. When night fell, she invited Anna to come with her to the chicken house. Taylor writes:

The chicken house was only about fifty yards from the house, down the hill from the garage across a patch of tall grass. The moon was so bright that night that we did not really need a flashlight, but I took one anyway, walking a couple of feet ahead of her to shine a beam in the direction we were going.

“I can’t see,” she complained when we turned the corner into the relative darkness beyond the garage.

“It’s not far,” I said, going ahead to light the way. “Your eyes will get used to it in a minute.” The day had been warm, so moving through the wet grass was like walking through a sprinkler. The first fireflies were blinking in the woods, and a whole choir of cicadas was singing in the trees. “Isn’t it great?” I asked, but there was no one behind me. Turning around, I scanned the grass with the flashlight, catching the gleaming eyes of dew on grass but no human ones above them. Heading back up the hill, I found Anna by following her sobs to the place where she had stopped, immobilized by fear.

Taylor attributes her niece’s fear of the dark to the fact that she was a city-child, unaccustomed to the darkness of rural nights. That may be so, but I think Anna’s fear probably ran deeper than that, an instinctive fear of the dark that nearly all children possess to one degree or another – hence the fact that there are roughly 90 million night lights purchased each year in the United States alone. Instinctively we fear the dark, and feel safe in the light. And it doesn’t really change as we grow older. Night time, even for adults, is the time when worries multiply, problems which were manageable during the day begin to overwhelm, and all our fears loom larger than they ever did during the day.

Instinctively we know what the Creation story proclaims: that light is the source of life and darkness the shade of death; that the light is good.

Moreover, even if we didn't grasp the goodness of the light instinctively, still we would have the Scriptures to teach us this. The word "light" appears nearly seven hundred times in the Bible. Some of those uses are literal – as in a light was shining in the window. But more often the word "light" is used symbolically – as a description of that which is good and is from God. In fact, the word "light" is often applied to God directly, as a way of naming His goodness. Psalm 27:1 *The Lord is my light and my salvation.* Jesus Himself announces in John's Gospel, John 8:12 *"I am the light of the world."* And that same John, 1 John 1:5 goes so far as to say that, *"God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."*

But, most often, God's good gift of light is used in the Bible as a way of describing the goodness of other gifts which the Lord has given to us. For example, light is often used by the writers of Scripture to describe God's good gift to us of salvation. Paul 2 Corinthians 4:6 *"God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*

He also reminds the Ephesians to recapture their gratitude for their salvation: Ephesians 5:8-9 *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)*

And no doubt Paul's use of light as a metaphor for salvation was helped by the fact that his own experience of salvation began in an overwhelming experience of the blinding light of Christ's glory, as he was travelling down the road to Damascus: Acts 9:3-4 *"Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'"*

Again and again in Scripture, salvation is described in terms of coming out of the darkness of our sin and into the light of God's mercy and redeeming love. God's first act in creation is to command, *"Let there be light."* And so, too, in God's act of re-creation in these lost and sin-broken souls of ours: *"Let there be light."* The light of God's mercy piercing the darkness of our hopelessness, obstinacy and denial before Him.

But there is more. A second important symbolic use of God's gift of light is found in the Bible's description of God's gift to us of guidance and instruction, His commandments on how to live as his children. *"Let there be light"* is also God showing us the path to take amid the darkness of this world.

Psalm 119:105 *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”*

Isaiah 2:5 *“O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.”*

Paul Romans 13:12 *“The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.”*

And Jesus Himself tells His disciples John 11:9-10 *“If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of the world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.”*

The Law of God, the instruction and example of our Saviour Jesus Christ, the guidance and correction of the Holy Spirit – all of this is described as a gift of light from God – light which enables us to know how to live amid the darkness of this yet to be fully redeemed world.

And all of this, really, goes back to that idea of God Himself being light: 1 John 1:5 *“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”*

That there is no darkness at all in God, means that He has no tricks up His sleeves, no hidden agenda, no evil scheme to mislead or confuse us.

That means that when He tells us to do this and not to do that, we can trust that what He is saying is not only true, but also in our own best interests. God, in whom there is no darkness, really does want life to go well for us in this world – so when He tells us how to live, He is showing us the path that will actually lead to life going well for us.

In His commandments, God is not trying to burden us with rules which will steal our happiness, but rather which will liberate us into joy. He is not attempting to circumscribe our freedom, but instead to establish us in the freedom of true well-being. Through the light of His commandments and instructions, God is showing us what is indeed the way and the truth and the life that works best for a human being in this world: John 1:4-5 *“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness shall not overcome it.”* God creates for us the light by which we are able to walk in the midst of this world’s darkness and confusion, by which we are able to find joy and peace and belonging.

And last, when the Bible uses the image of light to describe the goodness of life in Christ, it uses that image of light to describe what you and I become in Christ. One of the most amazing things Jesus ever said to us, I think, is this: Matthew 5:14-16

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

You and me – the light of the world! How can it be?

And yet it is Jesus who has said it: “*You are the light of the world.*”

“*Let there be light,*” commands the Creator – and in obedience to His command, not only does light begin to shine amid the darkness of the void, but God’s light also shines into the hearts, minds and souls of His people – changing them, inspiring them, until they themselves begin to shine before the world with the reflection of His goodness and glory. In God’s light shining upon us, you and I become changed into light ourselves, light of the world. You and I become the means by which God’s light brightens His creation and hastens His re-creation of the souls of others.

“*And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light*” – the light Christ’s love is often seen shining through His people, even in the midst of a terrible darkness. The light of God’s forgiving love shining through Iranian Christians upon that tortured land, and opening minds and hearts to the possibility of a new day dawning. Light shining in the darkness, which the darkness shall never overcome. “*You are the light of the world,*” says Jesus.

But we are light for Christ and light for the world not just in moments of heroic self-sacrifice. Light of the world is something we are and do even in the most humble of moments. I have been reading a wonderful book entitled **Light When It Comes: Trusting Joy, Facing Darkness & Seeing God in Everything**, by Chris Anderson. He speaks of our being light in this world as the way in which God is completing that initial command of Creation: “*Let there be light*”:

He tells this little story of this quiet, unnoticed, ordinary moment of Christian light – light illumining the darkness:

One Monday morning as I walked back from campus to the parish, I happened to see the church janitor sweeping the sidewalk on the other side of the parking lot. I was coming around a corner, so I could see him but he couldn’t see me. There was no one else around, except for a big, shaggy man sitting on the curb next to a shopping cart crammed with bottles and cans. It was just the two of them, the maintenance man and the homeless man, and what the maintenance man did was say good morning. He said good morning and chatted for a few minutes, a friendly hi-how-are-you as he kept sweeping up the leaves. He didn’t

have to. He could have ignored the man or asked him to get out of the way. But he didn't. He worked around him. He swept the walk and chatted about the weather, and the homeless man looked up from beneath his long, stringy hair, and nodded and said, Yes, like anyone else. Lovely sun.

Just another moment in which God said, "*Let there be light*" – and there was light – for just a moment, there was light shining upon that sidewalk, upon that homeless man, upon this world which God has made. All because of one maintenance man who knew that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all – and that we, somehow, by His grace, have become His light shining within the world.

And so God is still at work creating light in the midst of the darkness, creating light for His world and light in His people and light through His people. The light of Christian kindness, the light of out-reaching love, the light of service to another in Jesus' name. "*And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. And God saw that the light was good.*"