

## **The Light and the Darkness**

2Peter 1:16-21

The Transfiguration of Our Lord, January 21, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

God is light.

Anything that is not of God is darkness.

Anything that points to God is of the light and is light. Anything that points away from God is darkness and of the darkness.

God is light. He teaches and illumines those things which are necessary for your life, your comprehensive life, your eternal life, life not only of length but also of fullness. The darkness hides those things which are of your life. The darkness hides eternal life and those things which are the fullness of life. The darkness makes those things unfindable. The darkness brings death. It brings death in every sense of the word. It brings temporal death. It brings eternal death. The darkness points you away from God.

There are stories. There are stories that are entirely factual, but teach a lie and are therefore of the darkness. There are stories that are fictional, but teach the truth. They are of the light. There are fictional stories that teach falsehood. They are obviously of the darkness. There are factual stories that teach truth. They are obviously of the light.

The fictional stories that teach the truth are headed by our Lord's parables. They are largely fiction even though they relate things that happen all of the time in real life. In spite of their fictional quality they teach the truth and are therefore of the light and are light. That is to say that they are of God and they point to God.

Contrariwise there are stories that are completely factual but teach falsehood. One simple example from several years ago was the account given by a newscaster on TV about court cases moving through the system where those who promote the gay agenda had brought suit against those folks who had declined services to a gay wedding under antidiscrimination laws. The TV newscaster then immediately described court cases from the 1960s where businesses were sued by black people under antidiscrimination laws. The account that she gave was completely factual, but the stories taught a falsehood. They taught the falsehood that being gay and being black are equivalent under objective morality. They are not equivalent.

But that is not the worst of the darkness that true stories tell us. The worst of the darkness lies elsewhere. I could select a number of examples, but I do not want the sermon to be interminably long. There are those accounts of people who have come from humble beginnings and achieved great fame and success in their lives. The number of people who have done this seem endless. The Colonel from Kentucky Fried Chicken who did not hit it big until he was past retirement age. Harrison Ford and countless other famous people who came from humble beginnings to achieve fame and fortune are paraded on your viewing screens and on the biography channel and we acclaim them heroes of the American Dream. Each of their biographies are completely factual. Each of the accounts follows their life story from beginning to end. But the American Dream is the darkness and the falsehood that each of these things teaches. Each time the stories of these people are told there is an implied exhortation to you that even though you are of humble beginnings if you try hard enough you can make something of yourself. You too can be famous and achieve fortune and wealth if only you try hard enough, work hard enough, and never give up. The American Dream is darkness.

Many have made the American Dream their religion. They are constantly going to self-help books and groups and websites and facebook pages trying to find the secret that will make them a better and more successful person. And all the while they are pursuing these lofty goals, they are focused only upon themselves and their own success and their own fame. There are even churches who will preach to you sermons Sunday after Sunday telling you how to be more successful. In the name of Jesus they will blaspheme God and make the person in the pews the center of their daily Sunday message. That is the American Dream. It is simple self worship. It is simple idolatry. We want to make something of ourselves convinced that we can do it and ignoring the fact that there is only One who made us. If we claim in our hearts to be self made men, then we are simply claiming to be God and our idolatry and self worship is exposed to the light.

Such people change the Scriptures to make them about them and not about God. They read the Scriptures every day looking for God's instructions and commandments about how to be a better person and make something of themselves. That is why the book of the Bible is so dismaying to them. After all what is the account of the Transfiguration supposed to teach you about how you should behave in order to make yourself a better person?

Jesus from Nazareth is on a mountain. He is transfigured. His face shines like the sun. His garments are pure white. Jesus is talking with Moses and Elijah. Peter, James, and John are with Him on the majestic mountain. Peter offers to build three shelters, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Suddenly they are enveloped by a bright cloud. The voice from the cloud says, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him." The disciples cower. The cloud disappears. Only Jesus remains. Now what is that supposed to teach anyone who has their heart set on self exaltation? The only commandment that it gives is that you should listen to Jesus. But if that is the only take away from the account why the face shining like the sun? Why the white clothes? Why the cloud and the voice? Wouldn't it have served a better purpose of Jesus had given instructions to us on how each of us can make ourselves better people and achieve something and then at the end the voice of God could have told us to listen to Jesus.

It tells us nothing about how to make something of ourselves. What it tells us is who Jesus is. And that is why the account is the light and the American Myth is the darkness.

The very notion of making something of yourself is idolatrous in the eyes of God. It focuses your attention on you so that the only question you ever ask God or the Bible or anything is, "What is in this for me?" or "How does this help me?" Such a person presupposes that he can make something of himself and when he presupposes that he is guilty of the grossest of idolatry for only God can make anything of anyone for only God can make anything or anyone.

The Transfiguration is about Jesus. And because it is about Jesus it is about God. And because it is about God, it is about the light and is of the light.

I have pastor friends in the ELCA. They are men that I love and treasure their friendship. Once in a discussion about the origin of the creation one of them said to me, "People live in stories. I live in the story of the Bible. Leave the facts to the scientists." When he said that he seemed to be distinguishing between facts and stories. He tried to assert that people don't live in facts, they live in stories. He said that the evolutionary account of the origin of life is fact. He said the Bible is a story. He maintained his faith in Jesus because he thought that people and certainly he does live in stories not in facts. At the time he said this to me, he took me off guard. I thought about it a long time.

And then Christy and I vacationed to Chicago. I wanted to see the Chicago Field Museum. In fact I have wanted to go to the Chicago Field Museum or one like it since I was in first grade. When I was in

first grade, I loved dinosaurs. My parents had an old set of encyclopedias and I read the article on dinosaurs over and over again when I was little. There were paintings in that old encyclopedia of what the scientists at the time the encyclopedia was published of what they thought dinosaurs would have looked like when they were alive. My grade school took a field trip once a year. Every year they told me they were taking me to a museum. Every time I expected to see dinosaur bones at the museum! Every time we went, we went to a museum of Native American history or Nineteenth Century American history. I looked at place settings from the nineteenth century and moccasins and whatever else and was disappointed because I wanted to see dinosaur bones! When I went I was married I was older I knew better about the origins of life, but I wanted to go and see those bones anyway! So we went and much to the joy of my six year old self the exact same paintings as what were in that encyclopedia that I read so many years ago are full sized murals in the Chicago Field Museum.

But here is why I tell you this story. When I entered the section of the Chicago Field Museum on Natural History the first room held a bunch of fossils. The fossils represented organisms that the people who put the Chicago Field Museum together felt lived at the same time. And on the floor carved into the floor in big letters were the words, "400 Million Years Ago." I might have the date wrong because it has been a while since I was there, but I remember the floor told me how many millions of years ago the people who put together the display thought the organisms represented by the fossils in that particular room had lived. I went into the next room and a different set of fossils was on display. The floor had the date carved into it. It said, "350 Million Years Ago" or some such date that was not as far ago as the first room. The rooms continued in this fashion beginning with what people had hypothesized lived a long time ago and continuing down to the present day. Each room had a date. Each date was so many million years later than the date before it. And in the first room as I watched a young father with his cute blond haired daughter explain to her that the fossil she was looking at was alive 400 million years ago, it suddenly dawned on me. Evolution is a story. It is just a story. And because it is a story and my friend was right people live in stories not in facts, people live in the story of evolution. And evolution is not all that different a story from the American Dream. Organisms pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps and getting better and better over time until we come along. That first room that said 400 Million Years Ago or whatever it said, may as well have said, "In the beginning," or "Long ago in a galaxy far, far away," or "Once upon a time," because you see that is what 400 million years ago is. It is once upon a time.

The story is cleverly devised, but it is story. And that is all that it is. It is no different in its character than the Bible which is also just a story. But one story is light and the other is darkness. Evolution leaves you with no judgment and no justice. It leaves you without a humanity that is responsible and noble. It has only one that is evolved. And it leaves you with no need for a savior and only a dissolution of your molecules when you can longer hold your molecules together. People who are made in God's image call it death because God calls it death, but such death can only be seen in the light. In the darkness it is only a dissolution of molecules, nothing more, nothing less.

And without responsibility there is no need for a Savior and so a Savior is written out of the story. And since molecules do not of themselves reassemble themselves in evolution there cannot be a man who rose from the dead. And there is only darkness all around and no one can see God. They can talk about Him because the last vestiges of the light still linger in this dark world, but they do not know Him. Like the demons in hell they acknowledge him, but they do not trust in Him.

The resurrection of your Lord from the dead says otherwise.

The apostles have not merely told you a story. Oh, they have told you a story to be sure. Everyone tells stories. The apostles have told you an account of what they saw. They did not devise the story. They were eyewitnesses of the story.

They saw Jesus on the mountain of transfiguration. They heard the voice that was carried to them from heaven. They heard the testimony of God Himself concerning Jesus from Nazareth, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

The voice summarizes the story of Jesus. When the voice calls Jesus the Son of God, the voice is not merely telling you who Jesus is in relation to God, but He is also giving Jesus the traditional title of the kings of Israel. Ever since the days of David the kings of Israel were the sons of God. Now the voice declares Jesus to be His Son thereby declaring Jesus the legitimate heir to David's throne, the fulfillment of all of the prophecies of the Old Testament about David, and the appropriate and only ruler of Israel.

Then the voice says that He is well pleased with Jesus. That is a Greek way of saying it. The Hebrew would have said that His soul delights in Him. Here the voice is designating Jesus to be the Servant of the Lord about whom Isaiah had prophesied at length so long ago. Isaiah spoke of a servant of the Lord who would come. The Lord would delight in him. This servant would ultimately be a man familiar with sorrows and acquainted with grief. This man would be someone that would have no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him. We would consider Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. Isaiah pointed out that we all like sheep have gone astray and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah prophecies that the punishment that brings us peace is on Him and by His wounds we are healed.

This is the account of Jesus. He was all of these things that the voice from heaven said that He was. In fact it is by His crucifixion that Jesus appropriately executes His office of King of Israel. The judgments of God have been rendered upon human sin just like every king descended from David was expected to do and failed to do until Him.

This account is given in the light. God could have had the apostles figure it out from the Scriptures. God could have told them in a still small voice. He spoke to Samuel that way. Jesus could have instructed them in this truth.

Instead the truth is given on mountain top. The truth is given while the face of Jesus shines like the sun and his clothes are dazzling white. The truth is given from a bright cloud and the voice of God Himself pronounces it. Peter, James, and John were eyewitnesses of His glory and have reported it to you so that you too may hear the voice from heaven through them. So that you too may understand completely the account and significance of the story of Jesus from Nazareth.

The account of His life shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. He therefore shines in the darkness of your hearts. He shines the truth of who He is and who God is to you. In this way you may know Him and daily increase in the knowledge of Him.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.