

LIGHT + LIFE

Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind" (John 1:4). Light is associated with knowledge. There is knowledge to share, insight to gain. When we are in the dark, we are blind; but when we are in the light, we see. Light is purifying truth. Life is a little different. When we think of life, we think of activity. Jesus brings a new way of life, a new way of living in this world. His ways are actually life-bringing instead of life-sucking. Following the mission of Jesus means being those who convey His light and His life to the world.

LIGHT AND LIFE • Luke 4:38–44 • Tim McConnell • February 17, 2019

When we come to church we say something to each other—probably the phrase we say the most. Any guesses? “Good morning.” We say “Good morning.” But there’s an interesting phenomenon, and it’s not just our church I’ve noticed. We actually say that when it isn’t morning at all. A lot of times coming in at night for Growing Together Wednesday, or choir, or youth group, people will say to me “Good Morning, Pastor.” Then they catch themselves. It happens so much I’ve actually come up with a little response. They say, “Good morning, Pastor. Oh...oh...sorry.” Then I say, “That’s okay. It’s always morning in church. It’s always morning in the Lord’s house.” The problem comes when someone walks up to me at the grocery store at nine p.m. and says “Good morning, Pastor.” Then I really don’t know what to do. I can’t help you. We are just so used to seeing ourselves here on Sunday morning, our ingrained response is “Good morning.” It’s always morning in church.

Now obviously it isn’t always morning. Sometimes it’s nighttime. And it’s fairly important to recognize the difference. Remember from last week, “What sorrow for those who say that evil is good and good is evil, that dark is light and light is dark, that bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter.” (Isaiah 5:20 NLT) How sad for those who can’t figure out the difference between day and night, and get some sleep! It’s hard for us to imagine living according to daylight, but that’s how most human beings have lived their lives. When the sun is up they have light and when it’s down they don’t. We however live our days according to our own schedule in artificial light, but our bodies know. They say if you wake up in the middle of the night and look at your phone and that light shines on your face, something deep inside your brain gets a signal that the sun must be up and you can’t go back to sleep. God gives us night and day, and this is critical to health. Some old wisdom says if you don’t give your body something of what it needs it will start to demand everything it wants. We need sleep! Ken Shigematsu is a Japanese business man who became a Canadian pastor in Vancouver. He started out in the sleepless life of a Tokyo young executive, but God gave him a new rhythm. In his book, *God in My Everything*, he writes: “I assumed that if I could get by on less sleep, I would be more productive. Thankfully, I came to discover from both Scripture and the hard lessons of experience that getting sufficient sleep is not a liability but a gift from God... If we get enough sleep, we will find ourselves more present to God and more available to others. If we resist the gift of sleep,

we put ourselves at risk.” Amen. Go back to bed.

But Jesus uses day and night in another way too. Not only in the rhythm of healthy life, but Jesus uses day and night as a metaphor. Are you in the light or in the dark? Living in the day or running in the night, pursuing deeds of darkness where you think they won’t be seen? See, we are day people in Christ. We are light people in Christ. We don’t live in the shadows and the shame. We don’t live in constant fear of getting caught. We don’t want to be like cockroaches ready to scurry into our holes when the lights go on. Our deeds are known by God, forgiven in Christ, and we live without shame. “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). So, if we are in Christ, we are day people meant to walk in the light. “You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness” (1 Thessalonians 5:5). And as Jesus Himself said, “As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:4–5). We are sleep people, but we are not night people. We belong to the light of day.

Our passage has two interesting moments to focus on this morning. Jesus stands ready, His power is on display, at last light, and Jesus stands ready, His power is on display at first light. Last light. First light. There stands Jesus. That’s the point of the message this morning: Jesus holds your life at the edges, His grip is on the boundaries, at the fringes, and as you rest in Him, His power will bring you to light. Jesus is beginning and end, Alpha and Omega, and as Jesus holds your life, His power is your light.

Look at this: “Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them” (Luke 4:38–39). This is the same day that Jesus preached in the synagogue, the same day we were talking about last week. It’s the end of that day. The close of the Sabbath. Simon—that’s Simon Peter’s—mother-in-law was sick. They asked Jesus for help. Jesus moves in. Watch what happens, He rebukes the fever. Jesus talks to the illness. At some point you need to stop talking to Jesus about your problems and start talking to your problems about Jesus. He rebukes the fever. She is healed. And in

this remarkable character of humble service, she gets up and starts making dinner. Let me help you. Amazing. We would have forgiven her for taking a victory lap or two, wouldn't we? But her character is to serve in love. It's a good thing too, because I don't think Dominos delivered. There was no UberEats headed their way.

Now, the sun starts to set. That's the end of the Sabbath day and the beginning of another day. See in the Hebrew world, in the ancient world, the day ended and a new day started at sunset not sunrise. This was a huge encouragement to the people of God. Why? Because the very first thing that would happen was sleep! That meant the first thing that happened in the day was that God was at work while you were asleep. When you wake up, you are waking up halfway into the day God has already been at work to shape. See that? Various Psalms really pull this idea along and you'll read them differently next time with that idea in mind. But that's not where I want to dwell here. I want you to see what Jesus does, at the end of the day, at the remains of the day, at this moment of edging up to the limit where light is about to give over to darkness. "At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them" (Luke 4:40). The sick couldn't move toward Jesus until the Sabbath was closed. They come to Him. In the waning moments at the end of the day, they come. When the shadows are long and the cool of night is blowing in, they come. Jesus doesn't turn them away. Jesus, He extends the day. He pushes back the night. He heals all who come. Jesus has time for you, any hour. There is a sweetness and tenderness in this scene, but it's also so powerful, what's happening; it's so clear, the power of Jesus, that even the demons see it. At the edges, at the limits, at these liminal places the light of Christ shines through. Last light.

Next verse, it's morning. At sunset He did this, "At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them" (Luke 4:42). At the limits, at the edges, here is Jesus. Mark tells us a little more about this same moment when he says Jesus went out to pray (Mark 1:35). What happens at the edges matters. What you find at the fringe matters. First light. Jesus gets up to be in prayer, to center Himself on Christ (Himself), at first light. What do you encounter at first light? Lysa TerKeurst is a well-known Christian author. I

heard her say once in an interview that she feels like a sponge, and the thing she soaks in first soaks in the deepest. The first thing she soaks in in the morning soaks in the deepest in her mind and heart. So she developed an app called First5, helping mostly women give their first five minutes to the Lord every day and soaking in His Word before anything else encroaches. C. S. Lewis began every day on his knees. He wrote, "[It's at] the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger life come flowing in." He started and ended every day with prayer. I can't think of anyone I admire who didn't have a strong prayer life at the beginning of the day. That's convicting for me as I stand before you. How are your first five going? Jesus got up to pray.

Just like the clarity and brightness of Jesus at last light, the first light brings clarity too. Jesus is centered, as I said, on God, on Himself, on Christ, as we need to be. That gives Him clarity and confidence in His mission. Watch this now, the people keep after Him and they want Him to stay, they want to keep Him from moving on: "But he said, 'I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent'" (Luke 4:43). I've got a mission. I've got a purpose. And I have to go on and do it. Meeting Jesus at first light helps us move into our day with purpose. Leadership experts tell you to define the win of each day. Find that one thing that you know you need to do (or not do) to win the day. I like to pray the day. When I can I like to pray my calendar before the Lord. Each planning meeting, each expected challenge, and then give Him too the extra space and the undefined time to do with as He pleases. Last light, Jesus is there. First light, Jesus is there.

Jesus meets us at the limits. He is there at the edge. We feel His presence most at the extremes. I don't want to meet Jesus at the edge; I'm afraid of the edges of life, but we feel His power most when our power is at its least. When you are out of cards, Jesus shows His hand. When you are at the end of your rope, the saving power of Jesus shows up. At the limits, only one is powerful enough to hold your life. Jesus. Last light, first light. Jesus. Every day is a rehearsal in some ways for life itself, moving from edge to edge, from birth to death. We wake, we live, we sleep. Meet Jesus at first light; meet Jesus at last

light. Each rhythmic iteration is a training, a forming, a growing in trust that Jesus is found where our strength and capability is at an end. It's at the fringes where Jesus shines most.

I know a family who came to know the Lord when their mother was dying. To say family, I mean a man and his wife, and his sister and her husband and all their kids. They came to me and told me their story about how their mother who was a devout follower of Jesus was dying in the hospital and came to breathe her last on Christmas Eve 2010. I wasn't there; I didn't know them yet but they were there together, and they tried to explain to me and tell me how the presence of Jesus was so strong in that room, Jesus was so personally present in that place, that they, who didn't know Christ, could not do anything but acknowledge that He was there. It was so real, so palpable, they had to come to terms with it—the presence of Jesus. I think about what that must have been like, the light of Christ shining down in what was ostensibly a moment of deep sadness. I think about that woman I never met, and how she must have prayed over and over for her children who were far from the Lord. And there, in the final hour, at the limits, at the last light, when her power was at its least, at its limit the light of Christ broke through; and what joy she must now have not only in the consummation of heaven, but what joy to know that her son, and her daughter, and her son-in-law and her daughter-in-law, and all their kids, know and love and serve Jesus.

He's there at the limits. He's got this. He's got your life. No other has such power. And I just think this morning that maybe it's like this. You know how incandescent light bulbs work. Two poles with a filament in between, and the current runs from pole to pole, and everything in between lights up. Right? Jesus has got you. He's at the limits. First light, last light, first light, last light. He's there. And he's got you. Maybe the more we know that, pay attention to that, and have confidence in His grip on our lives at the limits, maybe the more we trust in His grip the more His divine current runs through us and lights us up just a little bit more. First light, last light, and everything in between, you can trust Him. "Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light" (John 12:36).

STUDY GUIDE
LIGHT AND LIFE • "LAST LIGHT, FIRST LIGHT"
Luke 4:38–44

UP: **Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word**

Read the passage for the week: Luke 4:38–44.

1. Reread verses 40–41. Jesus brings light to the lives of these people late into the evening. When have you felt like a situation was "too far gone" or it was "too late" for Jesus to show up?
2. Read Psalm 121. What do you think about the claim that God doesn't sleep, but incessantly watches over us?
3. Reread verse 42. Jesus spends all evening healing people and then rises early the next morning to go out to a solitary place to spend time with God. What do you think about this?
4. C.S. Lewis wrote on the importance of focusing on God each morning.

"...the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger life come flowing in."¹

What do you think about the imagery of your hopes for the day rushing at you like wild animals?

5. How can prayer, silence, and reading scripture combat this daily onslaught in your life?

IN: **Connect with Each Other**

Who do you know who needs good news/freedom/healing in their life? Close by praying for this person.

OUT: **Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)**

A few weeks ago, Pastor Tim called us to reconsider how First Pres can become a great place to meet Christ. In the last few weeks, what has come to mind in terms of how we could grow in this way?

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (San Francisco: Harper One, 2001), 168.